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Gleanings in holy fields

GLEANINGS IN HOLY FIELDS



GLEANINGS IN HOLY FIELDS

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PREFACE

THE spiritual harvests of the Holy Land have been rich beyond comparison, and the labourers have been numerous beyond count. But what astonishes one most in that wonderful land is what remains in it over and above, that has not been gathered into the garner. The gleanings of it are more abundant than the whole harvests of other lands. Every reaper seems, like the young men of Boaz in the fields of Bethlehem, to let fall some of the handfuls on purpose for the benefit of his successor. I have been gleaning "even among the sheaves," and I trust that for what I have stored up in this form I shall not be "reproached."

I may explain that nearly all the subjects treated in this book are more or less of an antiquarian nature. They have been selected for that reason ; so that there is a bond of common character between them, however diverse in other respects. They introduce the reader into some bypaths of Scripture study which are not commonly known ; and the practical religious reflections which they suggest, may have, it is hoped, a new interest from this unusual association.

H. M.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SHELLS OF THE SEA OF GALILEE.

"Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee."—*Matt.* iv. 18.

THE seashore, like the faint pearly streak of dawn on the horizon when day and night are just at parting, is the line of life. There is no other part of the earth's surface so significant. It is there that life originates. It is the point of junction between the sea and land, separating and yet uniting them. Over it the fertilising rivers pass from the land to the sea; and across it the waters of the sea pass as invisible vapours to form the sources of rivers on the cloudy inland heights. Without these rivers feeding the sea, and being fed by it in turn, life would be impossible; for the two things that are essential to all life are moisture and light. It was from the sea that land vegetation was derived. It passed through various modifications previously in the sea, before it became adapted to the dry land when the floor of the sea was changed, and exposed to the light and heat of the sun. All the fertility and beauty and fruitfulness of nature came originally from the seashore.

And as physical life originated there, so did the higher life of man. Civilisation is the product of that vital point of contact of the elements. It was on the sea-

margin that human history took the first steps of its sublime march. The beginnings of human culture were along the shores of the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean. The oldest kingdoms of the world sprang from the deltas of the Euphrates and the Nile. Babylon sat by the great waters ; Rome ruled where Ostia's waves washed the declivities of its seven hills ; and Memphis was enthroned where its sacred river branched out to the sea. There are words belonging to the oldest languages, seeming like fossils in the rocks, to assure us that the speakers of them must have been a sea-faring people. All the migrations of mankind followed the valleys of the great rivers, from the margin of the sea ; and the invention of the sail enabled the dwellers on the shore to put out to sea, and so people and colonise the world.

And as all life had its beginning in the great waters, so our human life still reminds us of them. The systole and diastole of our heart, the circulation of our blood, the strange alternations of our functions and vital processes, are relics and survivals of the ebb and flow of the primeval waters from which our being sprang. The rhythm of pain, the periodicity of fevers, the recurrences of hunger and sleep, the heaving and sinking of our chest in breathing, are tides of life that rise and fall in our bodies, with a definite regularity corresponding to that of the great tides of the ocean ; just as the small pulsations of secluded fresh-water springs in the West Indian Islands beat time with those of the mighty Pacific Ocean outside. And it is because of our ancestral memories that the sea produces such a deep impression upon us, and awakens in us such sympathetic feelings. We recognise in it a kindred element. It has an interest and charm ever fresh to us. As in a shell from the seashore, its mighty murmur dwells in our souls. The

deep in it calls to the deep in our nature, and they know each other at once.

“Hence in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be ;
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither ;
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.”

The shore of the Sea of Galilee has been indeed the line of life. It is not the shore of a great sea, the highway of nations, but the shore of a quiet inland lake, secluded among the mountains ; and yet there is no shore that has exercised such a mighty influence upon the world. It was the “*via maris*”—the way of the sea, by which the people who sat in darkness saw great light. By a wonderful chain of causes it acquired this extraordinary importance. The first link was a shell. Everyone who comes to the Sea of Galilee makes a special point of bringing home a few shells from its shore as an interesting memorial of his visit ; for there is nothing so characteristic of the spot as these shells. They are mixed with the pebbles in the utmost abundance, and in a few minutes you can gather several handfuls. This is a feature that seems peculiar to the Sea of Galilee ; for I do not know any other fresh-water lake that has its margin strewn with shells in the same way. It brings it into harmony with the shore of the great ocean.

The prevailing type of the shells of the Sea of Galilee is closely allied to that of the East African Lakes, where, and in the streams of Madagascar, it attains its fullest development. One form predominates almost to the exclusion of every other. This is the *Melanopsis*, a small univalve shell, convoluted and ribbed, with bands of white and brown alternating around its surface. It

varies exceedingly in its markings, being sometimes pure red, and often almost black ; while specimens occur out of which all colour seems to have been washed, and are pure white. All the shells found among the shingle are empty, and many of them are broken and disfigured by the action of the waves. The mollusc within this shell forms a large part of the food of the fishes of the lake. There is probably no other sheet of water in the world of equal dimensions that contains such a variety and profusion of fish. About thirty-seven different kinds have been found, of which hardly any are identical with those inhabiting the Orontes, whose water-shed is quite close to that of the Jordan. Some of the fishes are of a distinctly European type, such as the loach, the barbel and blenny ; others are as markedly African and tropical, such as the curious eel-like *Silurus* mentioned by Josephus, a variety of which exists in the Nile, and in all the great Equatorial lakes of Africa. Another fish of African type, common alike to the Sea of Galilee and Lake Tanganyika, has a very remarkable habit. The male, and not the female, takes care of the young, which rush, when alarmed, into its mouth and gills. The occurrence of these African fishes in bodies of water, now widely separated, is accounted for by the fact that during the miocene period there was a close physical connection between them, such as exists at present between the great chain of the American lakes. In the Sea of Galilee there are also fishes of an Asiatic type ; an Indian fish common in all the mountain streams of Assam, Nepaul, Deccan, Malabar and Ceylon, being found in it. From the earliest times the lake was renowned for its enormous shoals of fishes. One of the ten laws laid down by Joshua in the division of the country was that anyone who chose might fish in it without let or hindrance. The abundance of the fish was

owing to the abundance of vegetable-matter and shell-fish in its waters. With such quantities of food, the fish multiplied to such an extent, that the fisherman had only to cast his net into the lake anywhere, in order to get it at once filled with a great variety of fish.

Thus the second link of the chain of causation, determining the vast influence of the Sea of Galilee in the history of the world, was formed; and from it was fashioned the third link. The large and varied population of the waters led to a large and varied population of the land. The Sea of Galilee was the focus of all the life and industry of the Holy Land. No other part of the country was so densely peopled. No less than nine important cities stood on its shores, while the plains and hillsides around were crowded with prosperous villages. These sent forth their inhabitants in hundreds to search the lake for its scaly spoil. The town of Bethsaida derived its name from its fisheries, and most of its people were engaged in the fisherman's trade. The surface of the lake was constantly crowded with boats; and in every bay and cove fishing-nets might be seen drying on poles, and fishermen engaged in mending the rents in them. The fish caught in the Sea of Galilee were cured or salted, for in that tropical climate they could not long be preserved fresh; and in this cured state they were sent to Jerusalem in large quantities, especially at the season of the annual feasts, to feed the multitudes which gathered there. Near what was called the Fish Gate, was a large market supplied wholly from the Sea of Galilee, and presided over by Tyrian merchants. The chief seat of the curing trade was at the south-western end of the lake, where there was a large and important town called Tarichæa, from the Greek word for "pickled fish," whose site has been long lost. The pickled fish of this locality were well known throughout the Roman world,

and barrels of them were despatched to all parts of the Mediterranean. Within this horizon, therefore, were collected together representatives of all the nations of the earth, and of all the great branches of human industry, attracted by the rich resources of the place. Among them Jesus found a sphere of labour such as He could have found nowhere else in Palestine. Here there was a greater variety of human character, and a greater range of human circumstances; and therefore it was admirably adapted to be the starting-point of a many-sided, cosmopolitan Gospel which has revolutionised the world.

If the shore of the wide open sea is the line of physical and civilised life, the shore of the secluded, inland Sea of Galilee is indeed the line of the highest of all life, the life that is supreme in its individuality, that brings out man's powers and prerogatives into the strongest relief, and has personal relations and transactions with the living God. There the kingdom of heaven was manifested on earth. There the horizon of eternity opened up its marvels. There John the Baptist saw the glory of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Jesus walked habitually by the Sea of Galilee. It was His constant, favourite haunt. He spent a very large part of His public ministry on these shores. They are more associated with His presence and work than any other spot in the Holy Land. Capernaum was His own city, where He abode after leaving Nazareth. The air seems still to be hushed to hear the echoes of His words. The calm mirror of the lake seems still to retain the tracks of the boats in which He was conveyed to and fro, in the infinite number of little pathways of light and shade that fleck its surface, such as you never see on any other sheet of water. Every little wavelet that breaks on the shore seems to lisp of the time when the storm was changed into a calm at His word, and the wild billows formed a

crystal pavement for His feet. The whole landscape is an illumined page, on which the Gospel is inscribed more fully than anywhere else. The staple industry of the place furnished the Gospel narratives with a copious and most expressive imagery, which has passed into the religious language of the civilised world.

Here was spoken the remarkable parable of the draw-net, which, based upon the singular abundance and variety of fish to be found in the Sea of Galilee, truly typified the wide reach and effectual operation of that Gospel which has abolished all distinctions in the flesh, and gathers of every kind, of every nation and race, and class of mankind, both into the external fellowship of the visible church, and into a living and saving union with Christ Himself. Here was performed the significant miracle of the miraculous draught of fishes, which drew the fishermen of Galilee to His side, and converted them into fishers of men. And here at the close of His ministry on earth, He performed a second time the same significant miracle, with striking variations adapted to the altered circumstances, and so installed His disciples into the apostolic office, and gave them the assurance of success. And in the affecting interview that took place between Himself and Peter beside the fire of coals, and the fish laid thereon; the fish which the disciples caught, and the fish that was never in any sea or in any net of man, the Lord turned upon him with the searching question, "Lovest thou Me more than these?"—more than his fishing, his boats, and nets, and all his worldly goods? And Peter was prepared to abandon them finally and absolutely, as he had formerly abandoned them partially and for a season, and to prove his love by the most self-denying devotion—a devotion in which afterwards he never failed to the end of his life, which he laid on the martyr's cross. Thus, by the

wonderful symbolical teaching which Peter and his fellow disciples received in their fishing, they were prepared for the great gathering of all the saints around the risen Lord. They were able to leave the shores of Gennesaret, and to climb the mountain in Galilee, where Jesus had appointed to meet them, and there to receive the great evangelical commission, to go into all the world and preach the Gospel unto every creature, and to be clothed with His delegated authority and power.

The Sea of Galilee is indeed the cradle of the Gospel. It was in this deep, tropical hollow, more than six hundred feet below the level of the sea, that Christianity had its root. The ladder whose top reached to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it, had its foot set at the bottom of a trench such as exists nowhere else on the face of the earth. As it attained the highest elevation, so it started from the lowest; emblem of its own great truth of the blessedness of the poor in spirit whose is the kingdom of heaven. Heaven was always supposed to open on the loftiest heights, but here it opened on the lowest depths.

Thus we have unfolded to us the remarkable links in the chain of causes which led to the formation and development of Christianity. First the subterranean fires of nature prepared a lake-basin, through which a river afterwards ran, keeping its waters always fresh. In this basin a vast quantity of shell-fish swarmed, and multiplied to such an extent that they formed the food of an extraordinary profusion of fish. The great variety and abundance of the fish in the lake attracted around its shores a larger and more varied population than existed elsewhere in Palestine, who, in disposing of the products of the place in the open markets, made roads and organised means of conveyance, whereby this secluded district was brought into contact with all parts

of the world. And this large and varied population, with such ready access to all nations and countries, attracted the Lord Jesus Christ, and induced Him to make this spot the centre of His public ministry ; while He chose His disciples and apostles from the men who pursued the free and independent industry of the place, and who, by their very calling, teaching them habits of contentment and self-reliance, of patience, faith, and hope, were the best fitted of all men to proclaim the coming, not of a national, but of a universal kingdom.

But not only did Christianity take its rise from the Sea of Galilee, modern Judaism—the most conventional and systematic form of the old religion of the Jews—had its origin at Tiberias. The religion of the Old Testament branched out on these shores into the Gospel which was its necessary and obvious development, and into the Rabbinic law which was its decadence and corruption. The worship of the spirit and the worship of the letter can both be traced to this haunted spot. While the disciples were going forth from this place to all the world, preaching a free full salvation by the grace of God ; the Jews transported to this spot their schools of learning, and drew up in them those critical rules, and refined subtleties of Scripture interpretation, and minute codes of conduct, which narrowed the spiritual life in man until it was in danger of extinction. From the deep basin of this lake came the religion of love, that made man free indeed, that exalted while it humbled him ; and the religion of Pharisaic jurisprudence that enslaved and degraded him. Tiberias was the cradle of the Mishna ; and in its ancient cemetery are buried some of the greatest of the Jewish Rabbis, including the celebrated Maimonides, who helped to make the law of God of none effect by the traditions of men.

The Sea of Galilee is now one of the loneliest places

in the world. After having performed for a time the grandest part on the public stage of history, it has now—that its work has long been done—gone back to its primitive seclusion. Its once flourishing cities are levelled to the ground in indecipherable ruins ; its luxuriant woods have been cut down, leaving the hillsides and ravines arid and bare ; not a single white sail floats double ship and shadow on its bosom ; not a fisherman is to be seen casting his net into the cerulean waters ; and the waves murmur along the deserted shores a ceaseless requiem over the departed glories of the scene. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was removed from its physical and social associations in this place, that it might be more truly realised and more widely spread in the great world beyond ; and the spot has in consequence been left desolate, haunted only by its own great memories. The fish still abound in the depths of the lake, and the strand, laved by the limpid waters, is covered as of yore with myriads of tiny shells. While the population of the land has vanished, the population of the water still remains. But the grand results worked out by the former abundance of life have disappeared from this horizon to bless the rest of the wide world ; while the causes that helped to produce them are still left on the spot, to awaken far-reaching ideas in the mind of every thoughtful visitor, of the vast plan of God which comprehends the little and the great, and brings the great out of the little, and determines in the developments of the long ages that the last shall be first, and the first last.

We cannot but look upon the little shells brought home from the Sea of Galilee, as treasures and mementoes of travel in the Holy land, with new interest, when we see them in this new light, as the initiatory link in a long chain of causes that have helped to produce such mighty results. We are accustomed to think of the coral

polyp building an island, on which afterwards the highest achievements of human genius, and the mightiest triumphs of the Gospel, shall be realised; and in a similar manner the Galilean shell is correlated with the history of the religion of Christendom. The scallop-shell was the symbol of pilgrimage to the Holy Land; but the shell from the Sea of Galilee symbolises to us that which made such pilgrimages dear and attractive. It is the symbol of that which has drawn all hearts to this sacred shrine, and made it the most loved of all lands. We put it to the inner ear of the soul, and we hear the murmur of all the centuries of Christian civilisation in its depths. It seems to whisper to us, amid all the changes of time, of the kingdom which cannot be moved, and of the hope that maketh not ashamed.

CHAPTER II.

THE WELL OF JACOB.

John iv. 5-27.

It is strange that the most fleeting of all things in nature should yet be the most durable. Nothing is more transient, more changeable than water, which has a perpetual flow, which never continues in one stay, here at this moment and away in the next, appearing now in the form of a silver mirror in which you see your face reflected, and then in the form of a sunny cloud that reposes far above your head in the serene blue fields of heaven. And yet this vapour that appeareth for a little and then vanisheth away, is the most constant and permanent thing in the landscape. The features of a country change, the woods disappear, the fields are wasted, but its wells change not. Cities fall into ruins, and populous districts become lonely deserts, but the springs from which the old inhabitants used to drink, still pour forth their crystal waters to refresh the solitary visitor. Many a spot whose ancient name is forgotten is identified by its spring; and the wells of Palestine are the silver links that connect the ages and generations with each other, and preserve the hallowed memories of the past.

Jacob's Well is one of the most remarkable of these natural monuments, connected as it is with the earliest and the latest events of sacred history. It is one of the few spots in Palestine whose authenticity we are absolutely certain of. Over there to the right, you can still see the parcel of fertile ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph, and where in his youth he wandered one day in search of his brethren. On the side of yonder rugged hill is a white-washed enclosure called the Tomb of Joseph, where his bones were laid, according to the commandment which the patriarch gave in Egypt. Near it is a squalid village which occupies the site of old Sychar ; and at the mouth of the valley opening up beyond, is the modern Nablous which corresponds with the ancient Shechem. Ebal and Gerizim, on whose twin peaks the altars of an alien faith had smoked for ages, and which Joshua by the proclamation of the law made the Sinai of Palestine, looks down upon the well ; and around it the same cornfields which had nourished the ancient Shechemites, and to which our Lord pointed when He said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already unto the harvest," still spread their golden aureole. The shadows of four thousand years rest upon it ; and during that long period, from the time when the patriarch Jacob dug and bequeathed it, as his only possession in the Land of Promise, to his favourite son, its pulse has continued to beat, and its living waters to minister refreshment to the passing generations.

Unfortunately the Well of Jacob has not escaped that misplaced religious veneration, which cannot be satisfied with leaving the object of it as it is, but must build over it a shrine to make it more sacred. A series of buildings of various styles and at different ages have cumbered the ground, choked up the well, and disfigured the natural beauty and simplicity of the spot. At present the rubbish

in the well has been cleared out ; but there is still a domed structure over it, and you gaze down through the shaft cut in the living rock, and see at a depth of seventy feet the surface of the water glimmering with a pale blue light in the darkness ; while you notice how the limestone blocks that form its curb have been worn smooth, or else furrowed by the ropes of centuries. How much more pleasant would it be to see it in the sunny open, with the flowery fields around, and the blue sky overhead, with nothing to obstruct the view, just as it was in the days of our Lord, and as Titian and other artists have represented it to our youthful imaginations in our illustrated Bibles ! How much more easy would it be to realise its ancient verisimilitude in such circumstances, than now when it is seen in the dim uncertain light in the interior of a building !

Still, in spite of that drawback, it produces a profound impression upon the mind. I well remember how tired and thirsty I was, when, after a long ride from daybreak over the roughest ground and under the hottest sky, I dismounted in the afternoon from my horse, and entered the walled enclosure round the well, and rested for a little before going into the building on the grassy bank covered with yellow buttercups glowing in the sunshine. I could therefore understand in a way I never did before the feelings of Jesus, when, after His long fatiguing journey over the rocky backbone of Palestine, from Judea to Galilee, He sat down in the fervid heat of the Eastern noon, to rest His weary frame upon the brink of the well. Far down He could see the glimmering of the water ; and, parched with thirst, He longed for a draught, but He had no pitcher with which to draw it up, although the rope and pulley were there ; and His thirst was intensified by the inaccessibility of the water that seemed so tantalisingly near. How intensely human does the pathos of

that weariness and thirst make Him to us, recalling the touching words of the old Latin hymn, "*Quaerens me sedisti lassus!*"

Of all Bible stories, the interview of Jesus beside this well with the veiled figure that came from the neighbouring Samaritan village to draw water, is almost the dearest. It is so absolutely real, so vivid and life-like, that the mind, even of the youngest child, can easily picture it to itself. It is like a draught of cold water from the well itself, to feel certain that the incident in all its details is true. How wonderful is the dialogue in which Jesus, as His custom was, made the natural the type of the spiritual, and the common want of the body the exponent of the deepest need of the soul! How skilfully does His eye at a glance turn over every leaf of the soul-history of the alien and outcast stranger! And there by the wayside, on a chance occasion as it seems, He opens up to her the profoundest mysteries of His salvation. At first Jesus asks from her some of the water of the well to quench His thirst; but by-and-by she becomes herself the asker. She says, when Jesus spoke of the heavenly good that would for ever quench the thirst of the human soul, "Give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." The stranger's words awaken in her bosom strange yearnings for something better than she has ever been or known. But she wishes to get this good thing as a fairy gift, without any trouble, as we too wish to get answers to our prayers straight down from heaven without any toil or sacrifice to ourselves. She wants this living water to spring up at once out of her heart, as the water of Meribah issued out of the rock at the mere touch of Moses' rod. But not thus is this living water to be got. The well must be dug through the dry hard crust of her nature, as Jacob's well was dug through the rocky strata of the soil. There

must be a boring down through all the intervening obstacles to the very core of the heart, and the very quick of the conscience, till the tears of repentance are reached, till the soul itself melts into floods of penitential sorrow.

Very quietly and tenderly does our Lord begin this digging process, by bringing the sin of her life before her. We have only the words which He spake; but they must have been accompanied by a look such as Jesus gave to Peter when he denied Him. The force that was in the words themselves would be multiplied tenfold by the sorrowful, compassionate, soul-piercing look which He would doubtless give her. But she cannot bear it. She turns away the conversation from herself and her sins into a less painful channel, and seeks temporary distraction from the sufferings of personal conviction, by talking of the ecclesiastical matters in which the Jews differed from the Samaritans. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that it is in Jerusalem only that men ought to worship." For years perhaps she had climbed to the top of Gerizim, and joined in the peculiar worship that was carried on there by her countrymen; but all the time that worship had never once touched her conscience. She had not found God in these rites. Perfunctorily performed, as a mere decent profession of religion, they allowed her to go on in her sin with unruffled peace. She was no nearer heaven on that mountain top than she was on the plain of Sychar; and she descended from the sacred mount to carry on her sin in her own home, as if she had never worshipped God at all. She dealt only with a vague impersonal Deity who had not filled her with such an awe of his inflexible purity and holiness, as would make continuing in sin impossible to her. And therefore she finds a

relief in the thought of this formal worship from the stings of conscience now. She goes back in imagination to these ceremonies to escape her present humbling and disquieting convictions.

And how true is this procedure to human nature ! How many of us act in the same way ! The question as to whether we can worship in our own Gerizim concerns us more than the past record of a life of sinfulness, or the inquiry as to how it can be blotted out. How many are thus putting their Mount Gerizim between them and the personal dealing of the Holy Spirit with their souls ! How many are making even their religion an instrument which they are using not for Christ, but against Him ! They magnify the positive institutions of the church, and all the external rights of formal worship, in order that they may show how well religion may be kept up without change of heart or holiness of life. What have we to do with questions about church government, or creeds, or ordinances, or church-work, when we have to settle first of all the question of our own personal salvation ; when we are face to face with our sin and with a Saviour who is calling us to repentance and acceptance of divine grace. These things are good and necessary in their own place and in their own time, but they are irrelevant and obstructive hindrances when they come between the soul and its salvation. Mount Gerizim, and even Mount Sinai and all that they represent, must disappear ; Moses and Elias must vanish ; church rites and ordinances and theological disputes must retire into the background, and we must see no man save Jesus only.

Thus we see how at Jacob's Well is repeated the old wrestling beside the brook Jabbok. He who in the form of an angel met the patriarch, now in the form of a weary worn-out wayfarer, meets the woman

of Samaria. And just as at Peniel we see the struggle going on between Jacob and the angel, whereby clearer views of God, and deeper convictions of sin came to him; so we see the struggle going on between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar, whereby she rises from her gross materialistic ideas to purer spiritual conceptions, and is led at last, like Jacob, to know that her mysterious Visitant is none other than the Lord Himself.

Commentators have been at a loss to account for Jacob having dug a well in this spot, when there were inexhaustible springs of water at a short distance flowing freely into the valley from the mountains on either side. I was told by a native that at Nablous, half a mile distant from the Well of Jacob, there were no less than forty springs and wells whose water hardly ever failed in the hottest summer. In this, one of the most richly watered districts in Palestine, where the springs gushed spontaneously out of the ground, there seemed no necessity to dig with great labour through the hard rock for more than a hundred feet, to get a supply of the precious element. It may be sufficient answer to say, that the same reason which induced Jacob to buy a parcel of land in the neighbourhood on which to encamp, in order that he and his family and servants might be separated as much as possible from the idolaters of Shechem, induced him also to dig a well in it, that he might not be dependent upon their springs for his supply of water. He was a peaceable man, and wished to live peaceably with his neighbours, and would therefore avoid everything that might be made an occasion of strife—as springs frequently were. But admitting this moral purpose to have been the reason in Jacob's case, what could have led the Samaritan woman to pass by the copious fountains of her own town, frequented by all her friends

and acquaintances, and come out to this solitary well half a mile away? She admitted herself that it was a toilsome task to come there, and wished that she could be spared it. Was it because she was a kind of social outcast, and to avoid the ill-natured gossip about her affairs among those who gathered round the city wells? Or was it for a superstitious reason? Did she come to the well of her father Jacob because it was easier to go there as a shrine and pilgrimage than to the top of Gerizim? Was it her conscience defiled by a sense of wrong-doing and her heart thirsting for a happiness which she had never yet found that led her to this "holy well," that drinking of its water she might be absolved from her sin, and obtain a peace which the world could not give?

Superstitious men and women in all ages have looked for healing and life-giving powers to "holy wells"; and they have believed that if they drank their waters they should obtain whatever they wished. Such consecrated wells are found in great numbers in every land; and pilgrimages at stated seasons—generally on the first day of May—are undertaken to drink of them even in these enlightened days. It was a natural thing in ignorant times to worship these "eyes of the landscape" that seemed to have so much of the beauty and mystery of heaven in them, that opened up and revealed the soul as it were of the dark depths of the earth in the rejoicing fountains. It was a natural thing to regard with gratitude and veneration these sources of life and refreshment in the arid waste, around which tree and herb loved to grow, and which drew by the spell of their magic music all that was brightest and loveliest in nature to their side. A sharp-sighted friend of mine had noticed a number of cup-marks on a stone near Jacob's Well, into which libations must have been poured, thus proving that the site had been used for superstitious purposes in ancient times.

But Jesus beside the well was Himself the fulfilment of all the hopes and dreams of men regarding these most beautiful and useful of all natural objects. The worship that was paid to the divinities of the waters was due to Him alone. The oracles that uttered their secrets beside the sound of many waters, pointed to Him who beside Jacob's Well was the Living Oracle, speaking words of eternal life. He after whom the nature-worshippers groped in their darkness—the Desire of all Nations—revealed Himself in this storied spot, which was the earliest seat of the worship of the living and true God : and showed to men, that not beside holy wells, or in consecrated shrines only, was the Father of their spirits to be worshipped, but wherever there was a loving heart and a prayerful soul. Not by drinking sacred waters, not by washing in memorial wells, could the disease of the soul and the guilt of sin be removed, and the thirst of the immortal nature be quenched, but by living faith, and true repentance and heavenly love. He proclaimed that the hour had come when neither on the green turf under the open sky, on the summit of Gerizim, nature's own grandest altar, nor beside the golden mercy-seat, over-arched by cedar ceiling and marble roof, in the Temple of Jerusalem, on the summit of Zion, was God to be exclusively worshipped—though He might be worshipped spiritually even in these hallowed places—but in the sanctuary of the spirit and on the heights of the soul—wherever an earnest worshipper might be, however far from temple and shrine. “God is a spirit : and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” That great doctrine was a new revelation to the world. It substituted a living faith for dead works, justification by faith for the righteousness that is acquired by mere ceremonial, and so abolished for ever the worship of wells and of holy places.

The Syriac Codex has a very remarkable variation from the ordinary reading in the verse which records the return of the disciples to the well. It says, "And upon this came His disciples and marvelled that with the woman He was *standing* and speaking." Our authorised version refers only to the speaking, but the Syriac translation tells us that He was standing also. The disciples had left Jesus sitting on the well, in order to go into the neighbouring village to buy food. This is expressly mentioned, for He was overcome with the heat of the day and the fatigue of the long journey. But when they came back, according to the Syriac version, they found Him standing and talking with the woman who had come into the solitude during their absence. The woman was standing with her pitcher beside the well; and Jesus is always represented in sacred pictures as sitting beside the well talking to her. But conventional ideas of art have sometimes to be upset, and we are led by the peculiar expression in the Syriac Codex to ask, "Did Jesus, when He said to her 'Give me to drink,' remain sitting, or did He rise up and politely proffer His request standing, in accommodation to her standing attitude? And did He continue the conversation after this, until His disciples returned, in the same attitude?" The additional words in the Syriac manuscript leave upon our minds the impression that He had preserved this standing position throughout the whole interview, and that this was what caused the disciples to marvel. It is a common observation that He forgot His thirst, being so absorbed in the important subject of His discourse; but it is a new idea that He was so engrossed that He lost all sense of fatigue also. We have every reason to believe in the authenticity of this addition to the verse. There is a verisimilitude about it that convinces us of its truthfulness. It was so like our Lord! He who put Himself all along into our position, left

the throne of glory to assume our nature and dwell in our world, and live our life and die our death, and was made in all things like unto His brethren, acted in character when He stood with the standing woman beside the well and put Himself on her level. He who identified Himself with the mourners in their grief, who ate and drank with publicans and sinners that He might win them to repentance by a sympathy which they felt to be holy, who washed the feet of His disciples that He might teach them His own humility, could not, we think, have sat on the well while the woman was standing, but must have risen to show His respect for her as a woman, and to lift her self-respect from the mire into which it had been trampled, and make her worthy of a nobler life. And how brightly does this and all the other treatment of women by our Lord come out against the dark background of Jewish contempt! A Pharisee drew aside his robes when walking through the streets of Jerusalem, lest they should contract defilement by coming into contact with the skirts of a woman's dress; and even in the Temple, where all should be equal, a woman was restricted to the Court of the Women, and dare not penetrate farther with her husband or brother into the holy place. So contrary to the morality of Eastern races was the proper recognition of womanhood, that in the very heart of the Ten Commandments had to be inserted the special clause, "Honour thy mother," "Honour thy father *and thy mother.*" But the Gospel of Jesus Christ recognises no distinctions of sex, placing men and women upon a footing of perfect equality and making them heirs together of the grace of eternal life. No wonder that women whom He had thus enfranchised loved Him and ministered to Him of their substance and followed Him from Galilee to the Cross, and from the Cross to the Sepulchre. No wonder that the disciples marvelled when they saw

Jesus and this Samaritan woman standing together and talking on equal terms, the faces of both shining, we cannot help supposing, with the reflection of an inward heavenly joy that illumined their souls, and drew them so close that they seemed almost to touch each other, and at the same time surrounded them with such a halo of holy reverence that the disciples in their amazement durst not ask any questions. It is a delightful coincidence that this discovery of a new instance of our Lord's courtesy to women should have been made recently by two accomplished Scotch ladies in a convent of the Greek Church, from which, though it bears the name of a woman, the revered St. Catherine of Alexandria, women have always been rigidly excluded. Many of the words of the Sinaitic manuscript had been worn by age and ill usage, and had become almost invisible, so that they had to be restored by the application of a chemical reagent. And we cannot help thinking that the words in question, which were found in this condition, had been written at first in sympathetic ink, in order that the learning and zeal of two women might long afterwards bring them out of their obscurity, and reveal to us the beautiful trait of our Lord's character which they so vividly suggest.

What struck me most during my visit to Jacob's Well was the familiar look of the place. It had nothing remote or foreign or marvellous about it. The hills around looked the same as those of my native place; the fields were cultivated in the same manner; the grass and the buttercups reminded me of our own summer meadows; and the delicious perfume wafted by the breeze from a crop of beans in full bloom close at hand, awakened loving thoughts of my distant home, and sweet memories of days that are no more. There was a gentle peacefulness in the air; and the sky bent down over the earth,

on which the sacred feet had trodden, with a tender smile which touched the heart to the quick. The whole aspect of surrounding nature was in entire unison with the spiritual associations and divine suggestions of the place ; and you felt that Scripture facts and Bible words are not indeed separated from the common life about us, as we had imagined, but form part of it. It is not necessary to have far-off scenes and sublime surroundings in order to receive communications from the eternal world ; for heaven may open to us in the quietest and most familiar spot, in the midst of the daily round, the common task. I could not have imagined a more suitable setting, than that fair Samaritan landscape, for a picture of the figures and intercourse of the deathless twain who have given to Jacob's Well its matchless interest.

At the entrance of the enclosure round the well is planted in the ground one of the wooden poles that hold the telegraph wires between Jerusalem and Haifa. This unexpected object startles one at first sight, as a strange incongruity in such a sacred spot. And yet, discordant with the spirit of the scene as it seems, it has a deep significance there. It brings the secluded well in our thoughts into the midst of the busy world and the new order of things. It suggests to us the various methods by which the Divine words uttered beside that well have been communicated to distant continents and isles of the sea, first by the laborious pen of the scribe, then after a long interval by the printed page, and now by the lightning of heaven. It speaks to us of the marvellous results in the great world that have sprung from the teaching and life-work of Him who sat wearied on that well. It reminds us too that the Roman sceptre, the Christian cross, and the crescent of Islam have all held alternate sway in this haunted place ; while through all these

dynastic changes the descendants of the ancient people of the Samaritan woman still occupy unchanged their native home. Did our Lord, when He sat by the well, foresee this Mirza-like vision of the nations of the earth passing over this spot and dream of a time when this, the most cosmopolitan place in Palestine so far as its past history is concerned, shall become the most cosmopolitan place in all the world in the future history it shall make?

When Jesus spoke of the coming time when, instead of a local sensuous worship at Gerizim or Jerusalem, there would be a world-wide spiritual worship; when He looked on the white fields of Shechem ripening for the harvest around Him, did a vision of this most potent factor for the Christianising of the world, planted in the midst of these very fields, rise before His prescient eye? That telegraph post casts indeed a prophetic shadow before it, indicating the time, not far off now, when this little country—great only through the imagination, “infinite riches in a little room,”—shall share in the mighty benefits of the Christian civilisation it has originated, and its prosperity shall move altogether when it moves at all, like Wordsworth’s cloud! It indicates a time when the bugles of the Turkish garrison, which at present keeps the peace among the fanatical Mahometans at Nablous, shall cease to awaken the echoes of Ebal and Gerizim, and the Cross shall be the dominant power. And far more than this, it speaks of a time when the conversion of Israel shall be the redemption of the world; when the restoration of the kingdom to Israel will mark the blessed epoch when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of Christ. The telegraph will be the mightiest agent in this wonderful transformation, bringing all the ends of the earth together and making them one. And surely if in the natural world we employ the lightnings of heaven in our daily business, and “yoke our waggon to

a star," as Emerson profoundly says, we should not in the spiritual world condescend to the use of less noble means for the salvation of our souls. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

CHAPTER III.

THE DEW OF HERMON.

“As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion : for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”—*Psalm cxxxiii.* 3.

ONE evening while we were encamped on one of the spurs of Mount Hermon, beside a strange old village of the Druses called Mejd-el-el-Chames, our dragoman after dinner came into our tent to explain to us our route for the next day, and said, “Do you know that you are now at the foot of Mount Sion?” A universal shout of incredulity burst from our party. “No !” we said, “this is Mount Hermon ; we have left Mount Zion far away at Jerusalem.” Our dragoman waited patiently till silence was obtained, and quietly but firmly repeated his remark, “This is Mount Sion,” and for confirmation, he referred us to Deuteronomy iv. 48, where it is said, “From Aroer, which is by the bank of the river Arnon, even unto Mount Sion, which is Hermon.” The dragoman was right. In the passage in Deuteronomy the name is spelt with an “S,” Mount Sion ; and in the Psalm from which my text is taken, it is spelt with a “Z,” Mount Zion, which is the commonest form of the word ; but it is the same name, and has the same signification in both cases.

Sion or Zion means "the upraised" or "the lofty." It is the oldest title of Mount Hermon, and was afterwards bestowed upon the hill on which the highest part of Jerusalem was built on account of its elevation—the hill that has made the name familiar and sacred all over the world. Mount Zion "the upraised" or "the lofty" belongs far more to Mount Hermon than to the little hill in Jerusalem. Zion and Hermon refer therefore to the same grand range of mountains in the north of Palestine; and the two names are used in the Psalm in accordance with the well-known parallelism of Hebrew poetry.

Both names are admirably descriptive of the commanding position of Hermon, as the loftiest mountain in the Holy Land, the Mont Blanc of Palestine. At the spot where our tents stood, the great platform of the range towered over us to the sky line, three thousand feet, streaked with snow in all the upper rifts and gullies; while above this plateau, soaring up two thousand feet still higher, the principal peaks stood against the blue sky, covered with the purest robes of white. The snow seldom or for any length of time disappears from the summit of the highest point; and so there is hardly ever wanting from the bare and parched landscape below that vision of unearthly purity which is so suggestive of infinity and eternity. From every point this Jebel-el-Sheik, or chief of mountains, as the Arabs call it, is seen rising far above the other hills, and dominating the whole land. We saw its great white dome almost immediately after we left Jerusalem from every rising ground; and its imposing appearance was the background of every scene upon which we gazed as we travelled northwards, so that its features were thoroughly familiar to us. We rode along its rocky flanks; and the light from its unbroken snows, and the freshness of the air from its upper heights, cheered and animated us as we passed through the dreary

wastes that stretched between Mejdél and Damascus—and made the approach to the wonderful verdure and bloom of that city, so delightfully welcome by contrast.

On the principal ridge of this glorious mountain the ancient Canaanites erected a sanctuary; and to its ruins at the present day the Druses of the vicinity go up to worship every year in May. The religion of the Aborigines of Palestine was associated with high places; and chief of all the high places of the land was the rude cromlech or altar on the summit of Mount Hermon. A blind instinct taught these ignorant pagans that mountains were suitable objects of worship; for they were nearer the sky, and had grander views, and purer and more invigorating air than any other parts of the earth. They were magnificent objects in themselves, clothed with royal purple shadows at dawn and sunset, and the snow crowned them with a more resplendent diadem than ever monarch wore. They attracted the clouds, and hid their foreheads in the folds of the thunderstorm, and sent down into the valleys and plains the tempestuous wind and the destructive flood. But more than all, they felt that the nature gods which they worshipped had made these mountains the means of blessing to the whole land; for there the rain was distilled that nourished their crops, and the springs and streams formed that fertilised their fields. And the Psalmist but gave to this blind instinct of the pagan mountain worshippers the right direction and the proper consecration, when he referred the purposes and benefits of the mountains to the living and true God. The God of Israel, the God of the whole earth, he said, had commanded there the blessing, even life for evermore. The fact that the land of Israel was blessed instead of accursed, that it was a fruitful field instead of a barren wilderness; the fact that animal and vegetable life was maintained on it in health and vigour

from season to season, and from age to age—all this was owing to the dew of Hermon, and the dew that descended from the mountains of Zion. Remove that mountain range, and not only would its place be a great blank in the landscape, and an obliteration of what formed the noblest background of all the scenery of Palestine, but the land would become in consequence a barren and leafless desert.

The dew of Hermon and the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, to which the Psalmist referred, differs entirely from the ordinary dew of our country, and is a phenomenon peculiar to Palestine and the East. It is a soft mist that comes from the Mediterranean during the summer, when the heat is greatest, and the country is burnt up with the terrible sunshine. It is attracted by the inland heights, and condensed in copious moisture upon their sides, and creeps down upon the plains, reviving and refreshing every green thing. It comes first of all to Mount Hermon, and helps to keep up its unchanging robe of snow, and to fill its springs, and feed its cedars, and then it flows down and makes the corn to grow green in the valleys, and the vines to swell out their purple grapes in the vineyards, and the lilies to unfold their crimson radiance in the fields. And it is to this wonderful phenomenon that the Psalmist compares the unity and harmony of those who dwell together as brethren. It is a most beautiful and expressive image. For just as Mount Hermon that is high above the plains and valleys of Palestine, benefits them by its clouds and rains and streams, imparts to them the blessings it receives from heaven, and thus becomes essential to their life and well-being; so these plains and valleys in turn have helped to elevate and maintain Hermon on his throne, and send up to it their evaporations and radiations to become the sources of its spotless

snows, its billowy clouds, and its sparkling streams and cooling winds. They help it as much as it helps them. They are mutually dependent upon each other. The lowly plain does not envy the lofty mountain; nor does the lofty mountain look down in contempt upon the lowly plain. They are associated together in physical harmony. They are there in the great relation to each other appointed by Him who weighs the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance; and they could have no other position or shape or function. The one could not do or even be without the other.

So would the Psalmist have the inhabitants of the Holy Land to live. The 133rd Psalm was written after the restoration of the covenant people to their native land, after their long captivity in Babylon. It passes from the blessing of a united family to the blessing of a united nation. Before the captivity, the Hebrew kingdom was divided into two halves by the revolt in the time of Rehoboam, the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah; and these were constantly at feud with each other. Ephraim, that is the northern kingdom, vexed Judah, that is the southern kingdom, and Judah vexed Ephraim. And here the Psalmist by the beautiful image of the text teaches them that they cannot be divided from, or hostile to, each other, for their interests were one. For just as the northern part of Palestine helps the southern in physical things, and the southern helps the northern, so the two kingdoms could help and benefit each other in all the things of their common life. The southern people were told that just as the arid country of Judah which they inhabited was dependent for the water that nourished its crops and filled its wells, to the dew of Hermon in the far north, so they would be isolated and impoverished and weakened without the sympathy and co-operation of

their northern brethren. And on the other hand, the northern people were reminded that it was in the south, in Judah, that all the institutions of their religion were located, that it was in Jerusalem they ought to worship, in the temple and at the altar which God had placed there; and that just as the precious oil of consecration ran down from the beard of Aaron the high priest to the skirts of his sacrificial robes, so the blessing of the God of their fathers, beginning at the central shrine of their national worship would reach to them in their remote distance from it. The two rival kingdoms were implored to forget their religious and political jealousies, and not to continue the fatal causes of disunion, so selfishly initiated by Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin. Their only safety lay in recognising one centre of national worship, and in seeking a political unity through a religious one. Let the religion of Ephraim be like the all-pervading fragrance of the holy oil of the temple in Judah; and let the religion of Judah be like the moisture that is born from the snow-capped Hermon in Ephraim, and falls in refreshing drops upon the dry southern hills of Judah. The covenant people had lost the blessing through their division; they were weakened and in consequence were carried away captive, and their land was made desolate. The threat pronounced by the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "If these ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever." But now, if they become re-united and continue, in mutual harmony and brotherly kindness, to help and encourage each other in the good work for which God had prepared and called them; if they observe together the same ordinances of religion, and preserve together the purity of their national faith, then God would remove the threat, and command upon them the blessing, even life

for evermore. Their land would become once more a land flowing with milk and honey ; and they themselves would be once more a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people zealous of good works.

In the 67th Psalm, which was written after the sad division between Ephraim and Judah had taken place, the Psalmist refers to the effects of this blessed union : “ Let the people,” or, as it should be translated, “ let the tribes praise Thee, O Lord ; let *all* the tribes praise Thee.” The second part of this verse is something more than a mere Hebrew parallelism, something more than a mere emphatic repetition of the first. That word *all* tells us of the longing of patriotic souls for the ending of that bitter, long-continued quarrel which had wrought such havoc in the land. Let the divided tribes all cease their miserable rivalries and hatreds, and join their voices together as one united people to praise the God of their fathers, who was the covenant God of each of them. “ *Then* shall the earth yield her increase ; and God, even our God shall bless us. God shall bless us ; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” The prophets spoke of the coming of the Messiah : “ There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob ” ; that is, there shall come out of Judah, for Zion was Judah, the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, that is, from the ten alienated tribes who were the sons of Jacob. “ Ephraim shall no longer envy Judah, and Judah shall no longer vex Ephraim. With one heart, and in one way, they shall return unto the Lord.” And how wonderfully was this re-union and reconciliation accomplished in the most literal manner by the coming of the Deliverer, who was the son of David and the Son of the Highest. That scene at the presentation of our Lord in the Temple, the shrine of the Jewish unity of faith and nationality, shows us how Judah and Ephraim were

united in Simeon of the tribe of Judah and in Anna the prophetess of the tribe of Asher, which was included in the tribe of Ephraim, who held the infant Jesus in their arms. In that act of worshipping the Son of God the revolted tribes became one again in the persons of these two representatives of the tribes of Judah and Ephraim. Born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judah, of Judah's royal line, and yet reared in Nazareth among the remnant of the northern tribes, and familiar with the mountains of Samaria and Ephraim, who can be so fitting as He to restore again the united kingdom to Israel.

The blessing that was promised to united Israel of old would still come to every family and church and nation that dwelt together in the unity and harmony of love. God would command there the blessing, even continuous and prosperous life. What is the principal cause of unhappiness among men? Is it not strife and alienation, and mutual jealousy? Why does not the church accomplish its mission in the world more successfully? Is it not because of its sects and divisions and schisms? Why is the family not all that God meant it to be? Is it not because its members are not kindly affectioned one to another? Why are nations not fulfilling their destinies? Is it not because they are jealous and suspicious of each other, dreading attack, and armed to the teeth to prevent it? Most of the divisions and alienations among men arise from the inequalities of rank and fortune and privilege. The nation that is prosperous becomes a cause of envy and jealousy to the nation that is poor and struggling with difficulties. The church that has special privileges and advantages is hated by the church that is less favoured. The member of the family or the community who gets on in the world, and rises high above his brethren and friends, is regarded with coldness and dislike by them. Human nature as it is constituted

cannot bear these inequalities. And yet though we are often perplexed by such problems, and cannot altogether solve them, they have a wise purpose to serve, and are subject to a law working together for good. Inequalities of fortune and endowment seem, so far as we can see, to be part of God's plan for the benefit of mankind, just as mountains and plains are part of God's plan for the benefit of nature. Were there no mountains the low land would become a lifeless desert, and would be gradually eaten away by the waters, until at last a shoreless ocean would tumble round the globe. God has elevated certain tracts of land above the rest, in order that these elevated tracts might bless the lowland tracts, send down to them the rains and dews and streams to water and fertilise the fields, and cause them to produce life and beauty and fruitfulness every-where. And so were mankind reduced to one level of condition and endowment, the race would soon perish of pure apathy. There would be nothing to interest men in each other, or to induce them to stimulate one another. God has elevated some nations and individuals above other nations and individuals, giving them exceptional privileges and advantages in order that they might extend these blessings to those beneath them. As the dew of Hermon descends to the arid plains of Judah and makes them fertile and fruitful, so should the wealth and culture of the higher classes descend to the lower to benefit and improve them. Not for their own enrichment and aggrandisement has God bestowed special and exceptional gifts upon favoured races and individuals ; but that they might act as God's stewards, and dispense freely to those below them the blessings which they themselves have freely received. Like Him whom they profess to love and serve, they have ascended up on high in order to receive gifts for men. Their ascension is for wider and more influential diffusion.

Were this purpose of God in the differentiation of human society clearly recognised and cordially admitted as a wise and benevolent plan meant for the greater good of the greater number—then the jealousies and antagonisms which separate human beings from each other would be swept away. The brother of low degree would rejoice that the brother of high degree was exalted, because in that case he himself would share in the benefits of his exaltation; and the brother of high degree would sympathise with the brother of low degree, and seek to make up to him for his privations. This feeling of fraternity would be indeed as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion. It would command the richest blessing of heaven, and minister to the life and well-being of the whole community. Especially in the church would this goodness and pleasantness of brethren dwelling together in unity be felt. It is in the church where divisions and strifes make most havoc, because the corruption of the best is the worst—and the rule applies especially to its divisions, that the struggle is keenest between species that are most closely allied. When will churches recognise the fact that they supplement one another, and are meant to provoke one another not to envy and jealousy but unto all good works? When will their members learn the great truth that God bestows the blessings of salvation upon individuals, not that these blessings may be confined to them, but that they may be diffused by them. There is no such thing in God's scheme of grace any more than in His scheme of nature, as election to exclusive privilege and advantage. There is no monopoly of Divine favour. Just as Abraham and the people of Israel were divinely elected that all the families of the earth might be blessed through the blessing bestowed by God upon them, so every privileged person is elected by God not for purposes that terminate

in himself, but that his special culture and discipline may be the inheritance of others less privileged. The blessing bestowed upon him is God's ministry not to him only—but also to all whom he can influence and benefit. He is blessed that he may be made a blessing. He is exalted by God's grace, that like the dew of Hermon descending upon the valleys, His good may descend to others who are poor and needy. The elect of God are those who live like Him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and whose life is most fruitful of blessing not only for themselves, but also for others. No one sees any unfairness in such election. It is as necessary and beneficial as mountains in the system of nature. Their election is as the dew of Hermon to lesser heights. All such elect ones are esteemed and loved for their work's sake, and their privileges and advantages are not grudged to them because they are unselfishly used.

But we make a serious mistake if we suppose that it is all blessedness to be elected to higher positions and greater advantages. The mountain pays for its elevation by its barrenness and loneliness. It enters into bleaker regions of the air, and the frequent hoofs of the storm trample all life out of it. The mountain is covered with the snow of winter, in order that the lower regions may bask in the sunshine of summer. It is desolate in order that the valleys may be rich with bloom and verdure and fruitfulness. It is lonely in order that the plains may be populous with life and beauty. Hermon fills all the horizon and attracts every eye by its glorious hues at morn and eve, but its heights are among the dreariest and most naked wastes on the face of the earth. And is it not so among those who are to their fellows what the mountains are to the valleys, when they have a true conception of what their special advantages and privileges involve? The exalted head feels indeed that its crown is

a crown of thorns, and the man who is made the leader of his people groans under the burden of responsibility and toil. He has to bear heavier sorrows than those for whom he works, and to make greater sacrifices than those whose lot seems less favoured. And in Christ Jesus the Man of Sorrows we see how heavily He paid for His exaltation ; how the Majesty that raised Him above all principalities and powers brought Him under the sufferings of the Cross. The greatest of Beings was the Servant of all. The Friend of publicans and sinners, the Saviour of the world, was the loneliest of men. He who blessed all others had Himself like a desert well to apply to heaven for the supply of His own wants. We see among the snows of Hermon His transfiguration, His garments glistening whiter than the snow with the glory of heaven ; but drawing nearer we see the shadow of death upon His shining brow, and hear Him within the dark cloud speaking with His celestial visitors of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem—of the dew of blood that was to make there the wilderness to rejoice and blossom as the rose. The dew of Hermon is dearly purchased by the mountain's barrenness. It makes green no verdure on its own naked sides. It is all for the enrichment of other scenes. And the grace of Jesus was not for the blessing of His own life, but for the blessing of others. He came to give His life a ransom for many.

God commands by the dew of Hermon the blessing of plant and animal life on the low grounds at its foot. He continues there physical life from season to season, and from age to age. But this is not, and cannot in the nature of things be, life for evermore. There was a time when Hermon did not exist, when it was built up by coral creatures in the depths of primitive seas, or thrust up by volcanic throes ; and there will come a time when it

shall disappear and send down no more dew to water the plains. It is being daily ground down and wasted by its own beneficent ministries. Every cloud that rests upon its brow, every snow-wreath that glorifies its summit, every stream that channels its flanks, every sunbeam that falls upon it, and every raindrop that condenses on its cold side—all help to diminish its bulk, and sow the seed of other lands with the dust of its degradation. Its very dew that fertilises the valleys destroys its own form and substance. The mountain falling cometh to nought. The mountain shapes itself like a slower and more durable cloud, flows from form to form, and finally vanishes, and with it disappears all the life that it nourishes and sustains. But the earthly Hermon is only the type of the heavenly—the shadow of something grander and more enduring. There are everlasting hills to which we are to lift up our eyes, rocks higher than any in this world. From them come to us the dew of grace, and the river that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb; and God there indeed commands the blessing, even life for evermore. There God says, “I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.” However amiably and lovingly brethren may dwell together in the relationships of this world, death will dissolve all such ties. But united in the bonds of heavenly love, these ties will endure for evermore, and we shall be heirs together of the grace of eternal life. All earthly things—the most solid and lasting shall pass away, and we ourselves shall pass from them. But though the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, God’s kindness shall not depart from us, nor the covenant of His peace be removed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCENE OF OUR LORD'S NATIVITY.

“Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us.”—*St. Luke* ii. 15.

ONE of the most interesting journeys in Palestine is that from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. On the way to this hallowed spot of many memories, after passing the tomb of Rachel, where Jacob's beloved wife died by the way and was buried, and whose monument after four thousand years still hallows this spot, and whose memory saddens all the scene, you come by the roadside to a place called the Pools of Solomon, enormous reservoirs supplementing for Jerusalem the supply of water which its own springs furnish. From these pools aqueducts flow to irrigate the surrounding lands, and nourish a luxuriant vegetation. In one of the valleys, a short distance below the Pools—the ancient valley of Etham—is a village called Urtas, which is obviously a corruption of the Latin word *hortus*, a garden. Its Hebrew name, Hamath, which signifies “Baths,” from its abundance of water for bathing purposes, is the same as its Greek name Emmaus, the village where our Lord met with His disciples after His resurrection.

In the days of Solomon the whole region was a great system of waterworks, gardens, and pleasure grounds, with a palace attached. To its luxuriant vineyards, and orchards of pomegranates and pleasant fruits, the Song of Solomon is full of allusions. Josephus speaks of the early morning drives of Solomon in his chariot to this delightful retreat. The spot belonged to him as his inheritance from his father David, and his grandfather Jesse, the Bethlehemite; and as the family property of David's house, it must also have been the legitimate inheritance of Him who was the lineal descendant of David, and as such the rightful heir to his possessions and throne. But Herod the Great, the Edomite usurper of David's throne, seized also David's property, and so deprived our Lord of His inheritance in Israel, as he had tried by the slaughter of the Innocents to destroy Him who was born at Bethlehem, King of the Jews. Thus His own pathetic words were fulfilled: "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Herod appropriated the site of Solomon's gardens to his own use. It was his constant ambition to rise to and even surpass the magnificence of Solomon; and so he planted what he wished to be grander gardens where his predecessor's had been.

What a vivid interest does all this give to the simple narrative of St. Luke's Gospel, in which it is recorded that on the day of His resurrection Jesus joined two of His disciples on their way to this village of Emmaus, beside the Pools of Solomon. Lying within easy reach of Jerusalem, the quiet sequestered spot was often resorted to by the inhabitants for the sake of its baths, and also for the sake of its lovely scenery. It was for this purpose, doubtless, that the two disciples journeyed to it. They wished to be free from the

distractions of the city ; and in the calm quietude of the country to have composure of mind to think over the wonderful events which had recently happened in their experience. I have gone every step of the way, and I can picture before my mind's eye at this moment the aspect of the landscape as it must have appeared to them on that eventful day, for it has changed but little in all these centuries. Everything around them was in favour of a meditative spirit, the beauty of the day in early April, when the climate of Palestine is in perfection, and every scene in the lucent sunshine is a picture, and every sound in the mellow air is musical. How familiar must every object have been to the wayfarers ; for Cleopas, we know, was a native of Emmaus, and, as connected with the family of David, must have had some share in the possession of the valley. As they wended their way across the plain of Rephaim, now green with the sprouting corn, and bright with myriads of scarlet anemones, glowing like flames in the heart of a furnace, how pleasant every turn of the road would be, leading from Rachel's sepulchre, along the hillsides, in full view of the white houses of Bethlehem ; the pale ghostly limbs of the fig-trees everywhere arraying themselves in the first tender foliage of spring, and the almond trees, covered with pink blossoms, forming clouds of glory against the blue sky. Against this beautiful background of scenery you see standing out in clear relief the two disciples walking along the road. Our Lord never revisited His native place. He went up and down the land on His great mission of love ; but we nowhere read that He visited Bethlehem. Only when He rose from the dead did He come in sight of the city, for Emmaus was but a short distance from Bethlehem.

This wonderful history of the journey to Emmaus carries with it a lesson of deep significance to us. Travelling in the Holy Land is to many at the present day what that Emmaus journey was at first to the disciples. They are in the same sad, perplexed, and doubting frame of mind. It is so difficult to believe that such wonderful things happened in such a small and commonplace country. Many are resolved not to visit it at all, afraid lest the reality should dispel the ideal which they cherish in their souls. You catch yourself constantly wondering why the names of the rude and poverty-stricken hamlets of Palestine should have become parts of the deepest experiences of mankind. You see nothing in the scenes themselves to warrant, you think, this extraordinary homage. You cannot see any reason on the spot why Shunem or Nazareth or Bethlehem should be to the world a thousand times more suggestive than Egypt or Greece or Rome had ever been ; that at the mention of the names of these humble places the whole world is moved in deepest sympathy. But this sceptical mood is only a transient one. The spirit of Jesus joins itself to the humble, loving soul in the scenes of His earthly ministry. He opens your understanding ; and a journey through Palestine becomes, indeed, an Emmaus journey—a walk with Christ, wherein the great things of the past mingle with, and seem to get confirmation from, every scene and incident around you.

Bethlehem is situated on a high and long extending ridge. It crowns the top of this ridge with its white houses ; while immediately below, on the slope of the hill, are well-cultivated terraces of vines and fig-trees, and the valley at the foot is covered with rich cornfields, the successors of those in which Ruth gleaned after the reapers of Boaz. It is these cornfields that have given

Bethlehem its name, for Bethlehem means "the house of bread"; and to it Naomi came back from the famine of Moab because of its abundance of corn, just as the Israelites went down to Egypt in the days of Jacob. It is a scene of great fertility, contrasting vividly with the arid limestone hills that bound the horizon, and with the dreary wilderness of Judea stretching immediately beyond. And David must have had the scene before the eye of his imagination at the time when in the 65th Psalm he broke out into the exulting words of admiration: "The little hills shall rejoice," the sign of their joy being the vines which grow upon the terraces of the hills; "The folds shall be full of sheep; the valleys shall stand thick with corn."

Bethlehem is the most Christian of all the towns of the Holy Land. It is the spot that has been most thoroughly imbued with the religion of its august Son. In its flourishing condition, every visitor feels that it is a suitable birth-place for a progressive faith, which goes on to perfection, and is continually making all things new. It keeps a firm root in the venerable past, while it adapts its growth to the expanding influences of the new day that is opening on the land. The becoming blue gown and the red mantilla which the women wear is the traditional dress which we see in the oldest paintings of the Virgin Mary. And we prefer to think that the inhabitants have derived their handsome features and graceful carriage—so different from those of all the other races of the land—not from the Norman blood of the Crusaders, as is alleged, but by unblemished descent from the old Jewish population in the time of David. The beauty of the children, mostly of a fair European type, is remarkable; and not a few of them bear the hallowed name of Jesus. Indeed it would not be difficult to find in any home in Bethlehem a family group

presenting the traditional appearance of Joseph and Mary and the Holy Child ; and, altogether, a vivid sense of the reality of the beautiful domestic history, in which our Christianity originated—the simple family details which usher in the majestic event of the Incarnation—comes over one during a visit to this sacred place.

The centre of interest in the town is, of course, the Church of the Nativity. Surrounded by its three convents, Latin, Greek, and Armenian, it forms an enormous mass of buildings, like a mediæval fortress, rising up with imposing majesty from the midst of the small ordinary dwellings of the town. It occupies the eastern ridge of the hill, in front of the sunny market-place. As the oldest of all the Christian churches in the world, its hoary appearance awakens a profound feeling of veneration in the mind. The sun and rain of sixteen centuries have beaten upon it since the memorable day when, by order of Constantine the Great, it was built over the cave in the rock, which was the reputed stable in which our Lord was born. When the other churches in the Holy Land were destroyed during the ravages of war, this building escaped, owing to the halo of special sacredness which surrounded it. It was spared even when the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was burned to the ground. It passed scathless through the stormy period of the Crusades, and resisted the attacks of the fanatic Moslems, and to-day it is the only surviving monument of the oldest Christian times in the land. At first it belonged exclusively to the Latin Church ; but for a long period the Greek and Armenian churches have found a common lodgment beneath its roof. It cannot be said, however, that they dwell together in unity as Christian brethren. The part of each church is distinctly marked out by impassable boundaries from the others. And here, round the cradle of Incarnate Love, those who

profess the same faith are bitterly divided—symbol of strifes and schisms that have occurred everywhere throughout all the Christian centuries.

On the ground of its architectural peculiarities and historical associations, the most interesting part of the Church of the Nativity is the nave, which is the common meeting-place of the three Christian sects. It is the only part of the original building of Constantine that remains, and has a severely grand style of its own. On both sides are ranged a double row of Corinthian pillars with obscure figures of saints painted on them. The roof was originally made of beams of cedar from Lebanon, but our own Edward IV. repaired it with rafters of solid oak sent out from England. It was easy to recall in imagination, when standing on the floor of this mother church of Christendom, the historical events connected with the sacred building, culminating in the coronation here of Baldwin, the Christian King of Jerusalem, whose unhappy reign was the last struggle to establish the chivalry of Europe in the East. Anywhere else the grand old nave would have arrested the visitor, and held him spell-bound by the impressiveness of its features and memories; but here it was only a passage-way leading to the more wonderful vault beneath where the Saviour of the world was born.

With a lighted taper in my hand I followed my guide down a narrow staircase into the sacred grotto, encased with Italian marbles, and decorated with numerous lamps whose light dispelled the darkness and flashed back in brilliant gleams from burnished metal and polished stone. In a semicircular recess at the end of the grotto the full blaze of light is concentrated; and there on the marble floor a silver star worked into the stone indicates the spot where, according to the Latin inscription around it, "Of the Virgin Mary Jesus Christ was born." Over this star the roof of the recess is not more than two or three

feet high, and hanging from it, close together, are the beautifully wrought lamps, making a ring of dazzling glory round the star. In other parts of the grotto are various altars, such as that which marks the spot where the wise men of the East offered their gifts; "the Altar of the Innocents," beneath which thousands of Herod's victims are said to be buried; and the place where the angel appeared to Joseph, commanding him to take the Holy Child away from its enemies down to Egypt. But these sites are manifestly apocryphal, and stand in the same relation to the grotto of the Nativity, as the false incidents of the gospel of the Infancy stand to the true narrative of St. Luke's Gospel.

Passing from the grotto of the Nativity I was taken by a long subterranean passage to a capacious cave hewn out of the rock, called the Cave of St. Jerome. The walls, unfortunately, had been whitewashed and smoothed, but the rocky ceiling was left in its native roughness, and the smoke of the pilgrims' tapers for fifteen hundred years has blackened the limestone. In this cave the greatest of all the pilgrims to the shrine of the Nativity spent the last thirty years of his life; and here he made the famous translation of the Scriptures into Latin, which has received the name of the Vulgate. Here he fasted and prayed, and here he received the Last Supper and died, and was buried in a neighbouring cave. Apart from the profound interest that belongs to this historical spot on its own account, it is even more important, its own authenticity being unquestioned, as a means of authenticating in turn the site of the Nativity. There can be no doubt that St. Jerome believed the present grotto to have been "the literal cradle of the Christian faith." This was the tradition of the locality in the time of Justin Martyr, who was a native of Palestine, only a hundred years after the event had

occurred ; and St. Jerome was induced to give up everything on earth besides, and to settle as near as possible to the sacred cave, by the confidence which he placed in this story. Of all the traditions of the holy places in Palestine this is by far the most ancient.

The fact of the grotto being a cave does not constitute a valid objection, for in this part of Palestine there are numerous instances of caves being used as stables. This has been the continuous custom of the country from the earliest times. It is a profitable exercise of the imagination to go back to the primitive simplicity of the spot ; to remove the present vast group of buildings, and leave the ground bare and unencumbered ; to strip the marble casings from the cave, and bring it back to its original rude condition. In this way we should be able to realize the state of things when our Lord was born here. The spot, thus cleared, would be a rough, rocky ridge on the outskirts of the town, rising up in the midst of the patrimonial fields that belonged to David. It would have several caves in the face of it, as in almost every other lofty limestone ridge in the district. On the highest point stood an ancient khan or caravanserai, built originally by Chimham, the son of Barzillai, whom David, in gratitude for the kind hospitality and help of the father in his time of sore need, brought back from Gilead with him to his court, and to whom and his heirs the king gave a portion of his own paternal inheritance in Bethlehem. This inn was frequented by travellers belonging to Jerusalem coming from or going to Egypt, as it was on the ancient highway leading to that country. We have a record of its having afforded shelter to refugees who were fleeing from Judea to Egypt after the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in the time of Jeremiah. And we have every reason to believe that it was in existence when the parents of Jesus sought hospitality during their memorable visit to Bethlehem.

Filled with people who came to this their native place to be taxed, there was no room for the sacred family in the khan, who therefore sought refuge in a cave a short distance below the building, which served the purpose of a stable for the beasts of travellers. David's patrimony had been confiscated to his own use by Herod the Great, and David's Son therefore had nowhere to lay His head when He was born. The inn founded upon His paternal property—the gift of His father, David—took in strangers, but thrust out the lawful Heir. He came to His own, and His own received Him not. And there, in the lowly cave among the beasts of the stall, was born the Saviour of the world. He identified His lot with that of the creatures He had made; He entered life at the lowest point. There was no public recognition of the event. In the neighbourhood of Bethlehem there is a curious cone-shaped, truncated mountain, called Jebel Fureidis, or Frank Mountain, supposed to be the ancient Beth-haccerem, on which signal fires used to be lighted when any great event happened. It was made use of to carry in this manner the news to Israel and across the country far and near, that the Paschal moon had arisen, and would on the morrow usher in the great day of the Feast of the Passover. But when the greatest event in the universe took place, when Jesus, the Saviour of the world and the Fulfiller of all the Jewish types culminating in the Passover, was born, there was no signal fire kindled on the summit of Beth-haccerem to flash the good tidings of great joy from hill-top to hill-top to the utmost bounds of the land; no royal salute awoke the echoes of the surrounding mountains; no peal of bells rang out their joyful welcome. The town slept on unheeding in the darkness of the night. The heavenly Babe stole silently into the bosom of humanity. He came without observation.

We may safely then accept the grotto of the Nativity at Bethlehem as the true birthplace of Jesus. But how different is the scene which now meets our eye from that which it presented when Mary laid her child in the manger there. There was then no gorgeous gilding, or marble, or burnished metal, to desecrate with tinsel ornament the simple shrine. There was then no elaborate ceremony like that which commemorates the event on the spot every Christmas, with all the pomp and magnificence of a rich and long-established church. But in our heart of hearts we prefer vastly the primitiveness and naturalness of the first Christmas scene in the dark rude cave in the rock, and believe that it was more in accordance with the mind of Him who is meek and lowly—who made Himself of no reputation—and about whom heaven lay in His infancy, not in the splendour of church architecture and elaborate ceremony, but in the calm, quiet, undisturbed loneliness of Bethlehem itself with its beautiful hills and bright blue sky. The supernatural event blended here with the natural scenery, as the divine and human nature united in the person of the little infant. The song of the new creation pealed here over the uplands. But all was so quiet and natural that you ask with surprise on the spot, if these wonderful things actually happened here? We expect the marvellous, the visible opening of the glorious heavens; but we find ourselves surrounded only with what is common and familiar. The landscape here does not look different from any other landscape, and the sky does not come nearer to the earth, or exhibit a greater glory. The great triumph of omnipotence was just the suppression of power; the mightiest of miracles was that God could be in His world, and the course of the world not be changed by His presence. And this seeming unconsciousness of nature of the transcendent event that

had taken place here is in entire harmony with the whole order of the universe, and the whole principle of God's dealings with man. This is a world of probation, where our belief is not forced by overwhelming proof and visible glory, but where "our faith is quietly educated by God putting a veil over His face"; and as I stood and looked at the silver star in the pavement of the sacred grotto, and saw several Greek pilgrims kneeling and passionately kissing the sublime spot, I did not join them in going down on my knees before the visible material objects locating the great memory. But I too was drawn to the shrine by an "invisible star belonging to no earthly sky, by a constellation of the soul," and I bowed my heart in deepest reverence, and was humbled before the great majesty of the Incarnation.

It is a most suggestive subject of meditation that Jewish shepherds should have had such a great part to play in the story of the Nativity of our Saviour. We like to dwell upon the thought that the heavenly revelation should have come to them. To whom could it more appropriately have been given? The pastoral life which they represented was the beginning of the home and settled life of man. The care of his flocks and herds has been a great element in man's education; in the formation of his character, and the discipline of his life. The shepherd life was that of the great characters of the Bible. As shepherds the patriarchs and Israelites were trained for God's high purposes. Through their tending of sheep their mind and heart and conscience were fitted to receive and understand the great things of heaven. The Bible is a grand pastoral from beginning to end. The shepherding of sheep and the shepherding of men are what it constantly speaks of. Its oldest rite of the Passover had its origin in the primitive sheepfolds. Its ceremonial sacrifices were taken from the flocks; its

tabernacle was covered with their skins. God revealed Himself as the Shepherd of Israel, who led Joseph as a flock; and He who put it into the hearts of kings and prophets and godly men of old, inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak of the Lord as their shepherd, who instructed the Israelites by the sacrificing of their flocks in the divine mysteries, came Himself when He appeared on earth in human flesh to be known by the most precious and significant of all His names, "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." And in that glorious vision, through the opened door of heaven, which culminates and terminates the whole series of divine revelations to man, we see that amazing picture of the Lamb as it had been slain, in the midst of the throne, ruling the world which He had redeemed, carrying up to the supreme eternal point the one sacrifice by which He had perfected forever them that are sanctified.

Taking all these things into consideration, we feel it to be exceedingly appropriate that the revelation of the Nativity should be given to the Shepherds of Bethlehem. They were simple, unsophisticated, pastoral men, representing all the shepherd relations of the Old Testament, carrying on the old shepherd life unchanged on the very spot where David had watched over his father's flocks a thousand years before. And He who was David's Son and David's Lord, appeared to them as a little child, and was taken up into their strong arms, and by their baptism of consecration as it were, by the blessing of these shepherds, prepared for that blessed experience which enabled Him to say in after years, "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep."

The Shepherds were engaged in their common occupation when they received the wonderful revelation from

heaven. They were not standing idly gazing up into the sky, and neglecting the work they had in hand. They were not looking for something remarkable in the sidereal heavens like the wise men of the East, who saw the star that was to arise out of Jacob slowly swimming into their ken. They were simply engaged in their ordinary work, watching their flocks while they were feeding, and guarding them from the possible attacks of beasts of prey. They were thinking of their homely duty, not of ideal things; and all at once the glory of heaven shone round about them, and haloed them in their common clothes, and in their everyday work; and the wonderful announcement was made to them that in a way as lowly and homely as their own appearance and occupation the Saviour of the world was born, not in a king's palace, but in a cave that served as a stable for beasts of the stall. There was a certain dignity and honour connected with the experience of the wise men of the East. They were learned astronomers and sages, and the vision came to them in the form of a brilliant star; but the star did not disclose the form of the child to them on their own splendid watch-towers of science. It led them, on the contrary, far away from the scenes of their own renown to the manger-bed of the little Jewish child at Bethlehem. They had to forego their own greatness and wisdom, and to become as little children in the presence of this wonderful babe. But the shepherds had not to leave their employment, or alter their dress or change their nature in the least degree. Just as they were, in all their pastoral childlike trust and simplicity, they found themselves all at once in the midst of heaven, and they were brought, with their flocks following them, to the rude stable, with the light of heaven shining around them all the while.

Long before, on the ridge of Horeb, there was a lonely shepherd keeping his father-in-law's flocks, and while engaged in this common round, this daily task, there appeared to him a supernatural fire, burning in a native bush of the desert. The common desert spot on which he stood became holy ground, and he found himself face to face with God, who revealed to him the secret of the sufferings of Israel, and the meaning and design of their election and discipline; and the vision changed him from being a shepherd of sheep into being a shepherd of men, and his shepherd's crook became a rod of power, doing wonderful miracles for the guidance of his human flock. And are these things not significant to us upon whom the ends of the world are come? The disciples who gazed up into heaven after the ascending Saviour were commanded by the angel to go back to Jerusalem, and there, toiling in the Master's service among the hard common duties of life, they should find again the Saviour whom they had lost for a time. They would see Him in every little child, and hear His voice in the wail of every wayside beggar; and His Cross would be set up for them in every sin and sorrow and suffering of humanity. And so it is not when speculating about abstract doctrines, or dreaming about heavenly visions, or even thinking about our soul's concerns, that heaven draws near to us and reveals itself to us. It is when engaged in daily duty, doing the work of the appointed hour that is laid to our hand. We are exercising ourselves with things too high for us to know, too deep for us to understand. The revelation of Bethlehem is the revelation of humility; of Him who came as a little Child into our world, who revealed Himself to humble shepherds at their homely task. It is a revelation to the simple, to the meek

and lowly. We shall find Jesus not in great things, but in the little commonplace everyday things of life. The more we are converted from our pride and self-sufficiency, and become teachable and susceptible as little children, the more clearly shall we discern and understand the revelation of Bethlehem.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISTLETOE OF BETHLEHEM.

“And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.”—*St. Matthew* ii. 8.

PASSING down the steep terraced slope of the hill on which Bethlehem is built, in the glare of the white afternoon light, which once threw the shadow of Ruth on the pathway, I came with my party to the small village of Beit Sâhûr, where the shepherds of the beautiful Scripture story are said to have lived. A short distance below this spot I passed a rough irregular piece of ground surrounded by a rude wall, and enclosing a dark subterranean chapel built by the Greek Church. This piece of ground is called the Field of the Shepherds, for a very ancient tradition asserts that it was here that the shepherds were watching their flocks on that eventful night, when the serene sky kindled into glory, and out of it came the angelic annunciation of the birth of the Saviour of the world.

A number of old gnarled olive trees cast their mystic shadows over the sacred enclosure; and I noticed on the outside branch of one of them a matted tuft of light

green leaves, which contrasted in a striking manner, both in colour and shape, with the dusky hue and regular form of the rest of the foliage. With some difficulty I managed to pluck it, and I found it to be a species of mistletoe which is somewhat common in the Holy Land, and is parasitic on olive trees.

This mistletoe differs considerably from the species with which we are familiar in our own country. Its foliage is greener, and more tender and brittle, and it produces a profusion of rich red berries. It has not the simple symmetry of our northern mistletoe, but grows in a somewhat confused and irregular manner. Altogether it is a more luxuriant plant, and is more deadly to the olive on which it grows than our northern mistletoe is to the pear and apple trees of our orchards. At Nablous the mistletoe of the olive has become a perfect pest; for large numbers of the trees are infested with it, presenting a melancholy spectacle with their ragged and almost leafless branches, contrasting with the healthy luxuriant appearance of the other trees on which it does not grow.

The association of Bethlehem with the mistletoe struck me at the time as a very singular one. Here, where the first Christmas was observed, I found growing a plant which forms an essential feature of the festive season in northern and western lands. We cannot imagine a Christmas without its mistletoe any more than without its holly, for the decoration of our houses and churches and feasts on this joyous occasion. But it has no part in the Christmas observances of the East. It is essentially a northern symbol. It is an importation into the Christian festival of a mystic plant which belonged to the old Nature-worship of our pagan ancestors. As the wise men of the East brought their frankincense and myrrh to the cradle of the Divine Child, so the wise men of the North brought to the same shrine their mistletoe, which they

had been accustomed to use in their weird spells of Druidical worship.

But though the inhabitants of Bethlehem do not use the mistletoe in connection with the ceremonies of Christmas as we do, may not this mystic plant, which I found growing there, be still connected with the cradle of the Christian faith in an appropriate manner? May it not have a wider significance imparted to it? May it not be regarded as the symbol of all the parasitic growths that, throughout its long history, from the beginning, have attached themselves to the religion of Christ? How soon did alien superstitions and rites spring up and take possession of the vital growths of the Christian faith, greatly to their injury and loss!

The pure and undefiled religion of Jesus Christ had its creed and ritual grafted with Egyptian mysteries, Gnostic heresies, Greek metaphysics, and Jewish Neo-Platonism. The speculations of pagan philosophy, and the superstitions of heathen idolatry, were mingled with its eternal truths, and thus a leaven of corruption and decay was introduced into them. As the Jewish law had been made of non-effect by the traditions of men, so Christianity, in its turn, had its spiritual influence greatly impaired by the admixture of worldly and profane elements.

Much of the Christianity of the early ages was only a baptized paganism. Heathen customs were Christianised by simply appropriating them. Tares were from the first sown with the wheat. Parasitic growths began to fasten upon the olive trees of the Church. The prevalent idea of the early purity and simplicity of the Church is a fiction. Even during the lifetime of the Apostles heresies and divisions and corruptions had crept in, doing incalculable damage. The Hebrew Christians were drifting back into Judaism, and the Galatian converts were turning away from the Gospel to the Law; and in almost all the

churches there were doctrinal errors and evil practices which were slowly sapping away their foundations. Our Lord's messages to the seven churches of Asia disclose to us the hosts of misgrowths which had already appeared upon and disfigured the fair promise of the Christian faith.

From the very beginning Christianity had its parasitic growths. Even on the olive tree at Bethlehem the mistletoe had sprung up. Even in the Shepherds' Field the opening of heaven was the disclosing of hell; and the angelic song of "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill to all mankind," was followed by the wail of the mothers of Bethlehem for their murdered children.

When the Lord was made flesh and dwelt among men, Satan sent his evil spirits to take possession of their bodies, and so to imitate the divine incarnation by a devilish one. Simeon, when he held the Babe of Bethlehem in his arms, said that He was set for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that should be spoken against. And He Himself said, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." The Holy Child called out both true and false worship. The shepherds represented the fealty of the nobler Jews; the wise men from the East represented the homage of the Gentiles, who were truly seeking after God if haply they might find Him; and Herod represented the mock worship of the world. The Jewish shepherds and the Persian magi—by virtue of their faith—were grafted as true branches in the sacred olive tree, belonging to it by kindred nature, and united to it by living sympathy. Herod, on the contrary, was an alien parasitic growth, having no affinity with its nature, and only attached to it for selfish purposes.

Thus at the very commencement of the Gospel story

we see the germs or indications of what afterwards became great and luxuriant growths on the side of goodness and on the side of evil. We see true branches growing by a true faith and love in the True Vine; and we see false parasitic growths fastening themselves to it, without any organic connection, but only a mechanical attachment. The proffered worship of the Holy Child at Bethlehem by Herod is the first symbolic mistletoe as it were which we see growing on the sacred tree of life. It is interesting to look at the incident in this light. The common notion is that Herod was insincere in all his relations with the Babe of Bethlehem. From the first moment that he heard of the birth of a prophetic King of the Jews he resolved to compass His destruction, and thus secure that there should be no possible rival to his own throne. When he sent the wise men to find out where the wonderful event had taken place, and bring him word, that he might go there and worship, he was only using a crafty device to conceal his deadly designs. But, bad as Herod was, there is nothing in the sacred narrative to warrant our taking up this conception.

At first, we may well believe, the idea that was working in his mind was not incompatible with genuine reverence. He knew, as every Jew of that age did, that the Messiah, whose coming had been foretold by all the prophets, was about to appear. The patriotic heart of every true Israelite was stirred by the national hope that was intensified by the struggles of the time. The whole mind of the people was bent upon the coming event; and the scribes and rulers were on the watch-towers of expectation. Herod himself doubtless looked forward to the Messianic kingdom, not as to a rival dominion, in which he should be superseded, but as to the reign of a spiritual king who should deliver the land from the

hated dominion of the Romans, and bring back the glory of Solomon's reign. And, king only in name as he was already, he would prefer to be under the spiritual authority of an ideal king of his own nation and blood, than under the political supremacy of the hated Cæsar. What was to hinder the Messiah occupying the religious throne of the Jews, while he himself occupied the seat of highest political authority? The claims of both might thus be harmoniously adjusted, and Herod might be more secure in his high position, according to this plan, than in his present circumstances as the vassal of capricious Rome.

We may therefore suppose that, at first at least, he meant to be sincere in his worship. We must remember that Herod was a man of very mixed character ; with fierce impulses and frantic outbursts of passion, and yet with a nature susceptible of generous and noble things. He was full of pride and worldly ambition, and yet he had a deep religious susceptibility. The wild blood of the desert Edomite ran in his veins, while as a son of Abraham he had high visions and aspirations. He committed terrible crimes, and was consumed with the most fearful remorse. But his moral excesses never altogether obliterated his religious fervour ; and as a proof of the power it had over him, he rebuilt the Temple of Jerusalem on a far grander scale than that on which even Solomon had erected the first building.

A nature with such tragical elements in it could not have been without a certain greatness. The man who was capable of such terrible fits of remorse as he had was capable of passionate self-sacrifice and devotion. Underneath the crust of his cruelty and ambition lay a conscience not wholly lulled to sleep ; and the coming of the Babe of Bethlehem may have wakened it for the time being to activity, and lifted him to visions and

aspirations of a brighter future. Every longing of his better nature beckoned him to accompany the wise men to the shrine of the infant Messiah, there to worship in lowly reverence. But he was too proud of his kingly state to go there in person. He resigned the task to others, and so lost the opportunity—lost the high leading of the star of Bethlehem, which might have brought him to light and peace. And, reducing in this way his worship to mockery, he himself was mocked by the wise men of the East; and on the half-illuminated soul the double night of disappointment and despair speedily rushed down; and he culminated his life of crime by the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem, hoping to include among them the very Being whom he had previously intended to worship.

The worship of Jesus which Herod intended is the type of much of the Christian worship that has been carried on ever since. Herod would have added the religious prestige of the Messiah to his own authority, and made use of His heavenly influences to advance his own ambitious designs; just as he had supported the claims of the Jewish high-priest of the day—in order that he might have the benefit of his political adherence and official position. There is a gorgeous species of mistletoe which grows upon the acacia trees in the valley of the Jordan, near Jericho. It produces splendid scarlet flowers, which completely put into the shade the modest native foliage and blossoms of the tree on which it is parasitic. It uses the sap of the tree for the production of this magnificent display, which is no part of its own life; and in a short time the noxious intruder destroys the tree which it thus adorns. Like that mistletoe, the worship of Herod would have deprived of its spiritual vitality the Christian faith which it patronised with its worldly pomp and power.

And there have been many mistletoes of a similar kind since the days of Herod, flourishing on the olive and acacia trees that have beautified the place of God's sanctuary. When the Christian religion got into the ascendant, and became the dominant power in the world, it acquired numerous parasites of that kind, whose worship was a patronage of it for selfish, worldly purposes.

Constantine the Great was another such as Herod the Great. He allied the Church with the State for his own aggrandisement. His faith was a mere superstition; but he made use of it to increase his political power. He sought to plant the Kingdom of Heaven on earth by means of the sword; to administer its affairs and carry on its sacred objects by earthly rulers and earthly wealth; so that its divine origin and character were almost forgotten, and it came to be regarded as a mere human organisation, and men saw in its work only human activity, and not divine power.

And so with the Papal dominion which succeeded the empire of Constantine; it made the Church, not a creation of Jesus Christ, but the offspring of man's policy, and in consequence veiled its simplicity in splendid rites and ceremonies, and its spirituality in worldly pomp and wealth. The Herods of the Church who have patronised it by their worship for the sake of its worldly advantages have done incalculable injury to the religion of Christ, and have caused the enemy to blaspheme.

They have been selfish mistletoes which, instead of working with the true branches to support and extend the general life of the tree, to maintain its healthy appearance, so that it might shade men from the evils of life, and enable it to bring forth fruit for the benefit of the world, have as alien growths been feeding upon its sap, appropriating it to their own good, and so contributing to its speedy decay and death. The human authority

that has been employed to win outward homage from men to the Christian faith has only oppressed and stifled it. The social and political influences which have been employed to establish it have only weakened it. Cut off its heavenly connections, and root it in the persons and policies of the world, and you reduce the olive-yard of the Lord to the miserable appearance of the olive trees of Nablous that are infested with their noxious parasite. It becomes barren and shadeless, and at last languishes and dies.

How many worship Jesus after the similitude of Herod ! They think they cannot prosper in the world of business unless they bow to some extent to the world unseen ; they cannot get the favour of God without acknowledging to some extent His claims. They have a vague belief in the truths of the Christian faith—a vague fear caused by the possibilities after death. They are troubled by these things as Herod was when he heard of the new-born King. There is a chance that they may be true ; and therefore it would be prudent to attend to them in some measure, and to pay some outward homage at least to the ordinances which represent them. Worship like that, based upon self-interest, lacks the very elements of true worship and becomes a rank mockery. Worship is the trust of the whole heart, the submission of the whole nature, the devotion of the whole life. It gives all—for it is founded upon the conviction and experience of the infinite worthiness of Him who is the object of worship. Why did the Holy Child appear in Bethlehem ? Why was the Word made flesh ? Was it not that men might forego their own selfishness and worldliness, and through faith and lowliness of mind become as little children ? Was it not that men might cease to worship worldly pomp and greatness, and see the beauty of self-sacrifice and love ? To bow before the Babe of Bethlehem is to

bow the whole soul at the feet of Him who had left the throne of heaven to become a little Child on earth, and to seek to have the same mind of lowly obedience and loving self-sacrifice.

If our worship is like that of Herod, inspired by worldly motives alone, then we have no part or lot in Christ Jesus. We are like the mistletoe on the olive tree at Bethlehem; we are parasites and not branches. Our interest in Christ Jesus is a sordid self-interest, which, though it may present for a while a fair appearance, and win the respect of our fellow-creatures, will inevitably end in the loss of our faith and in the loss of our spiritual life. We destroy the Christian faith in which we are rooted in this alien, parasitic way. We take all the virtue out of it by our selfishness; we sacrifice it to our worldly advantages, and it ceases to have any reality for us. Our fear and doubt about the future leave everything that concerns our peace unsettled. Like the mistletoe, we bring forth fruit for ourselves only, not for the living tree on which we grow. And at last the false growth, and that on which it had established itself, wither away for us as a delusion, and that day our very thoughts perish.

Like the shepherds and the wise men from the East, let us come personally then, to the manger of Bethlehem. Let not the seed of that Nativity at Bethlehem which, at this joyous Christmas time, is bearing branches throughout all the world, adorned with the loveliest flowers and the most precious fruits, produce in our case a mere spurious, alien, parasitic growth, like the mistletoe on the olives of Bethlehem. But let us seek to be grafted into the true olive tree of the Gospel, that we may become, like it, partaker of its nature, sharing its life and bringing forth its fruit—that fruit which is unto holiness, and whose end is everlasting life.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KIBLAH.

“His windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed.”—*Dan.* vi. 10.

WHAT impresses you most in entering a Mahometan mosque is the feeling of vastness and emptiness which it gives. It is simply a wide space walled round, and roofed over by a lofty dome. Its fundamental idea is the Tartar or Bedouin tent. It has very little detail of architecture, and there seems to be no central point towards which the lines of the structure converge, explaining the purpose for which it was designed. There is a pulpit in the corner, it is true, but it seems a mere accident in the building rather than the object of it. But after awhile you discover that the mosque has a focus of interest and use; and that focus is a kind of alcove or niche in the wall, which is sometimes richly decorated and made conspicuous by its form or material—but most frequently is so simple in its construction and so plain in its adornment, that unless you knew of its significance it might easily escape your notice. This niche is called the *Mihrab*, and is intended to mark the direction in which

Mecca, the sacred city of the followers of the prophet, lies; and that direction is called the Kiblah. Every worshipper kneels on the carpeted floor, with his face looking to the Mihrab; for in so doing, he is sure that he is looking to the right quarter where his prayer will be heard, and from which his help will come.

The Mihrab is, so to speak, the mariner's compass of the sanctuary, and it varies, of course, in different countries. The Kiblah point, or the direction in which Mecca lies, which it denotes, is in Syria and Palestine the south, in Egypt the east, and in Constantinople the south-east. The celebrated so-called Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem, the holiest sanctuary after Mecca, has four doors which face the cardinal points, but it has no Mihrab, for it is not a true mosque; it is never used for prayer or worship. It is simply a magnificent covering for the rude rocky top of Mount Moriah—the foundation stone of Solomon's Temple, and it is called, from that circumstance, the Dome of the Rock. It is merely a "station" in the outer court of the true Aksah mosque near at hand, which has received its name of Majid-el-Aksa—the "far-off praying-place," in allusion to its distance from Mecca. It may be mentioned, however, that the rude rock on the floor of the Mosque of Omar was the original Kiblah of Islam, till Mahomet substituted for it the Kaaba or sacred stone at Mecca, and appointed that that stone should be for all future times the sole Kiblah point towards which his followers should turn their faces in prayer. The pillars on either side of the Mihrab, in this Aksah mosque, are so close to each other that it is difficult for a person to squeeze his body through between them. Pilgrims used to attempt this feat in the hope of thereby securing future admission into heaven; and the sides of the

pillars were worn by the constant friction. But a tragedy occurring there on one occasion, the Pasha of Jerusalem put an end to the practice by setting an iron stanchion between them.

This ordinance of the Mihrab had a much older origin than the inspiration of Mahomet. It points far backwards to the primitive Asiatic sun-worship, the oldest and most natural of all forms of idolatry. The region of the rising sun was the region of life and light, of warmth and hope and joy, and therefore it was regarded as the home of Deity; and the ceremonies of religion were performed by the worshipper looking to that quarter. In Egypt, Assyria, and Greece solar temples were so constructed with their doors open to the east, that as the sun rose, his first beams shone right through into the inmost sanctuary, where they were reflected from a golden disc and illumined the whole place. The priest waited till this cloud of glory filled the shrine before he began the appointed rites of chant, and incense, and prayer. From pagan worship this custom passed into Mahometan worship, and the Mihrab of the mosque is at present a relic or survival of it. Mahomet, with wonderful shrewdness, adopted all that was best in the old natural religion of Arabia, and adapted it to his own new faith.

Sun-worship was an abomination to the Jews; and therefore the arrangements both in the Tabernacle and Temple were such as to cause the worshippers to face not towards the east, but towards the west, in the functions of religion. Such also was the practice of the Jews in the synagogue when the Temple disappeared after the destruction of Jerusalem; and by setting their faces in an opposite direction to that of the heathen worshippers of the sun, they attested their abhorrence of that worship. And hence the significance of the

vision of Ezekiel, in which he saw, with horror-stricken eyes, a number of worshippers standing at the door of the temple of God, between the porch and the altar, with their faces towards the east, worshipping the rising sun in that quarter. This attitude implied that they had turned their back upon the temple, and all the holy worship that was carried on in it; that they had forsaken the living and true God, and gone back to the idolatries of the heathen.

The influence of the old sun-worship still acts "diamagnetically to adjust the axis of the church, and turn the body of the worshipper." The ancient custom of the Mihrab has been transmitted to Christianity. Everyone who is conversant with religious architecture and ritual knows about the orientation of churches, or the placing of the sanctuary or part containing the altar towards the east. All the early Christian churches used to end in an apse that pointed in the direction of the rising sun. They had their entrance in the west end, so that those who passed within might have their backs turned towards the region of the sunset, and therefore of darkness and death, and their faces turned towards the altar in the east where light and life and happiness came from. In praying towards the east the soul, too, it was believed, was seeking and longing for its old home in Paradise, to which it hoped to be restored by Christ Jesus, the second Adam. The Son of Man, as He Himself said, would come again at the last day—"as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west"; so that in prayer the Christian worshippers were looking and waiting for their Lord's return.

The position which Daniel in Babylon assumed, when engaged in the private worship of the God of Israel, had

a two-fold significance. It was a protest against the prevailing idolatry of the place, and a proof of his ardent love for his native land. Many of his countrymen had yielded to the evil seductions of the luxurious life around them. They married heathen wives, and lost their Jewish pedigree. They forgot their sacred city, and settled down contentedly in the land of their captivity. But Daniel was too noble and patriotic to follow their example. In the midst of the universal idolatry, he clung more closely to the pure faith of his fathers ; in the midst of the magnificence around him, he thought all the more sadly of the desolation of Jerusalem ; in the midst of the varied cosmopolitan society of the capital of the world, fusing all races into one, he preserved all the more faithfully his national exclusiveness. He was one of the true-hearted Jews who wept when they remembered Zion, and could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land for the heart-break in their voices. And therefore when performing his daily acts of devotion, he chose a room in his abode whose window looked to the west and not to the east ; thus at the same time turning his back upon the worship of the sun which the people of the land practised, and his face towards Jerusalem the centre of his faith and the goal of his hopes. The reigning monarch was regarded as an incarnation of the sun-god, and divine honours were paid to him ; but to Daniel the representative Jew at the royal court, this worship was impossible, and therefore he turned his face in prayer from the region sacred to the idolatrous god which the nations worshipped, to the region where the living and true God had set His glory and declared His name. With the windows of his palace wide open to let in the air and light of heaven, every passer-by could see him kneeling in his chamber. He did not leave the usual place of prayer and seek some more retired spot in

consequence of the king's command ; and he did not place himself conspicuously before the eye of the public and court observation in order to defy the law. Calmly and meekly, without ostentation or concealment, without any self-consciousness, he did as he was accustomed to do. He made no difference in his daily habits. Through all the changes in his circumstances, he made no change as to the law of his God. He acted with the utmost simplicity and naturalness, in the manner of all Eastern people who perform their devotions in public, and place their prayer-carpet wherever they happen to be.

Far from the sanctuary of God and the sacred objects of Jewish worship, he had recourse to spiritual communion with heaven. No oblation or burnt-offering was possible in the land of his exile. But the universal presence of Him who declared that heaven is His throne and earth His footstool was realised all the more vividly in the absence of the local symbols ; and the practice of devotion and the sense of eternal things became more earnest in the loss of earthly ceremonial. With his face turned towards Jerusalem, and all the yearning of an exile's heart, we can be at no loss to know what must have been the substance of Daniel's prayers. The times were very dark and evil ; and the fortunes of God's heritage had sunk to the lowest point. The Holy Land was laid waste ; the Holy City was a desolation ; the temple of God was in ruins ; the covenant people were captives in a heathen land. In these sad circumstances, if the Jew at the present day in the " Weeping Place " at Jerusalem does not cease to importune God to have mercy upon his unfortunate nation, and to turn again its captivity ; how much more keenly would the patriotic and pious Daniel feel for the woes of his people, and how much more passionately and persistently would he besiege heaven for their restoration. For however much he

might grieve over the destruction of the Holy City, he could never despair of its ultimate triumph. He could look beyond the gloom of the present to the bright promise of the future. The captivity would end; the exiles would return home; the Holy Land would be re-peopled, and the temple would be raised up from its ashes to witness again for the pure faith of Israel. And therefore he prayed earnestly with his face to the west, confident that the evening star of his country's temporary decadence would become the morning star of his country's glory; that out of the sunset and the darkness would come the dawn of a better day for the world.

This then is the significance of the Kiblah of Daniel, the direction of his face in prayer. The Mihrab, or praying-place of his chamber, was in a different quarter from that of all the rest of the world. All the rest of the world looked eastward; he looked westward. The west was to them the region of death and darkness, while the east was the region of life and light. But to Daniel the west was the region of hope and new life. Salvation was to come not from the sunrise, but from the sunset, from the dark national calamities that were to endure for a night, while joy was to come in the morning, when the discipline of the darkness had purified and prepared his people for the light.

The prayer of Daniel was like the prayer of Peter in similar critical circumstances. On the top of the house of Simon the tanner by the sea-side at Joppa the apostle stood. The view behind him was circumscribed by the high land on which the town was built. Jerusalem was completely out of sight; no part of Judæa could be seen. The horizon of the east with its completed history, its exclusive law and religion, closed behind him. But before him expanded an endless prospect over the western waters, the horizon of Christian history, of the

world-wide time-long faith and kingdom of the Son of Man. The Mihrab of Peter pointed still farther west than that of Daniel. Away towards the setting sun were the islands of the Levant, famous in ancient story, the stepping stones of the gospel in its first giant strides from its cradle to its great field of manly enterprise—Greece, Rome and Spain, the realms of Europe, destined afterwards to be the scenes of its most momentous conquests. Daniel was removed to Babylon, and Peter to the seaside at Joppa, in order that, separated from all the rites and sacrifices of a local ceremonial law, the worship of God might be free and world-wide. There was to be no Kiblah or Mihrab, no Gerizim or Jerusalem ; but everywhere God was to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. His spiritual worship was henceforth to have no local habitation or fixed form. Everywhere the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous was to ascend to heaven like incense, and the lifting up of the hands as the evening sacrifice. Through the absence of ritual, and the loss of sacrifice, was to come a deeper recognition of the power of personal prayer wherever offered.

When Solomon finished his magnificent temple, in his dedicatory prayer he asked from God, as a special favour, that every suppliant, no matter where he might be, or however he might be situated, if he turned his face to the sanctuary of God, might have his petition granted. And therefore, every Jew was accustomed to turn his face to God's holy place when he engaged in prayer, and expected a special blessing to come to him from that region. But when we pray we do not turn our face to one particular quarter ; for all quarters, we have been taught, in the dispensation of the Spirit under which we live, are alike to the praying soul. God is not confined to temples made with hands. Wherever there is a suppliant, there the prayer-hearing God is to be found.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and so is the operation of God's Spirit; it can come from the four winds of heaven with equal readiness and power. There is no specially sacred direction; for all heaven in its height and depth and length and breadth is over the praying soul, ready to pour down its blessings in answer to believing prayer. But with this loss of a special direction in which to turn our face in prayer, is there not apt to be a loss of definiteness and reality in our prayer? Do we direct our prayer to any quarter at all? Is it true of us what Christ said of the Samaritans: "Ye worship ye know not what"? Is our prayer a mere formality, addressed to the idle wind or to empty space, or to an abstract deity? If so, it is worse than a Mahometan's prayer. His Kiblah may be to us a superstition; but to him it is a solemn reality, and his prayer, addressed to a living personal being, has all the earnestness of conviction and sincerity. His Kiblah is the expression of the deepest longing of his soul; and therefore his prayer, even if he turns to Mecca in uttering it, has more of the nature of true prayer in it, than a mere conventional form without meaning or purpose.

The earthly Jerusalem is no longer the quarter to which we are to direct our prayer. Our prayer is no nearer to God's throne, and has no better chance of being heard by Him there, than in our own church or in our own closet. Let us look up to heaven from this very spot on which we stand. Heaven bends over us here; the mystic ladder of communication between heaven and earth is set up here. Above us, on the throne of glory, our ascended Lord is seated, having all power in heaven and earth, that He may bless His people. The attraction of our souls is there, where the great Intercessor is pleading on our behalf within the veil. The captive Jew of old looked in Babylon to the

hills of Palestine. His desire was to them ; his hope was from them. All the help that he expected to get in the world was to be derived from them. But the hills to which we are commanded and encouraged to look are higher than any earthly hills, and nearer too. We have to seek help from the highest source ; and the highest source is not farthest off and most inaccessible, but nearest at hand and most easily got at. It is not hills on the remote horizon that are to give us help in our necessity, but hills that are around us, as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, closer, more impregnable, far richer in resources. Our help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. And let us remember that while His Divine presence fills immensity, His Saviour presence is peculiarly with His own.

The observing eye notices in entering a Mahometan mosque that a number of ostrich eggs are suspended from the dome in front of the Mihrab. This is not a mere ornament introduced into some mosques, and wanting in others. It is an essential symbol, and is present in every mosque. It is a part of the religious service, as important almost as the place of prayer itself ; for it tells every worshipper that, as the ostrich sits on its eggs with indefatigable patience day and night until they are hatched, so should the praying soul brood over its desire, and persevere in prayer until it is answered. It is this entire pre-occupation with, and perseverance in prayer that is needed to bring it to full fruition. There is no complaint more frequent than that of wanderings in prayer, letting the thoughts go away in different directions, often opposite to what is desired. We are removed in our closet from outward distractions ; but even there the very law of association by which one thought gives rise to another may divert our mind from the subject upon which it is bent. As we follow a particular train

of thought, our mind is constantly liable to turn aside from the narrow path of prayer, by the suggestions which that train of thought itself originates. Each separate idea which rises in our mind has its own associations, and we are ready to go out after these diverging lines of thought, till we lose sight altogether of that which we are praying for. And not only is our prayer thus made ineffectual and aimless, but it may actually be turned into a sin; for by this natural law of association, it may call up in our mind the scenes and circumstances of the evil from which we are seeking deliverance, so that they may exert their old fascinating power over us, and before we are aware, we may be led to react in our thoughts that very evil again. How necessary then is it to concentrate all our attention upon what we are doing—to pray that our heart may be fixed while we pray, and that we may desire one thing of the Lord. And thus having the true spirit of prayer, if irrelevant and foolish thoughts will intrude in spite of all our vigilance, and if we cannot turn them out by increased concentration of purpose, we can convert them into the very materials of devotion, and seek through them for greater humility and watchfulness and earnestness. And thus the intended mischief will become the means of richer blessing.

And let us remember that God's answer to prayer has no fixed direction—no sacred Kiblah. It often comes from the quarter where we least expect it. We fix our gaze upon a particular part of the horizon, nothing doubting but that the cloud no bigger than a man's hand will appear in that quarter, and grow large with blessings to be poured down upon our head. And while we kneel and pray, and mourn that the sky in that direction continues as brass, and no cloud big or little comes to break up the weary monotony, we never notice that in the opposite direction, the heavens are clouding over and

there is the sound of abundance of rain. Though not in the direction from which we desired, the blessing will come ; and perhaps it will be all the richer and more suitable for that reason. “ For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is judge.” Only, like Daniel, let us pray with our face towards the heavenly Jerusalem, the abiding city and habitation of our soul even now ; and our prayer will be heard, and God will turn again our captivity as the streams in the south.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FOUNTAIN OF CAPERNAUM.

“Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?”—*St. James* iii. 11.

SEVERAL little touches have been noticed in the Epistle of St. James which show that the writer must have lived not far from the sea. He speaks about a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed, and of the ship turned about with a very small helm. His home may have been where Jesus spent the years of His public ministry, on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee; and there he may have made himself familiar with the fishing operations carried on in this locality, and obtained those sea-images which he uses so graphically.

In this region there is a considerable stream bursting forth with great force from the ground, and after a short course falling into the lake. This is supposed by some writers to be the celebrated Fountain of Capernaum, mentioned by Josephus as watering the plains of Genesareth. Into the principal stream several smaller springs rising close beside each other flow, and the water in them all is slightly brackish and tepid. All the fountains are swarming with fish; and there is one kind found there so extraordinary that I must pause a moment to

describe it. It has a long body like that of an eel, about three feet in length, and two fins, one on the back and the other below, while two long feelers are attached to each side of its mouth. It buries itself in the loose sand at the bottom, leaving all its feelers exposed. This uncanny looking fish is known to scientific men as the *Clarias macracanthus* or the Silurus, and to the Arab fishermen as the barbour. It is very abundant in the muddy bottom of the Sea of Galilee, and where the papyrus grows in Lake Huleh. From the Sea of Galilee it migrates to the Fountain of Capernaum for the purpose of spawning. It is found in three other fountains along the shore of this lake, and in the waters of the Upper Nile and in the African lakes. Josephus wrote about it under the name of Coracinus, and his description was long regarded as an old wife's fable, until it was verified by its discovery in the Sea of Galilee. The Jewish historian accounted for its existence in this lake and in the Nile by supposing that there was a subterranean communication between the two waters. But the true explanation is, that in a recent geological epoch the Sea of Galilee and the great Egyptian river as well as the African lakes were connected together and included in one vast Ethiopian basin. The Jews do not eat the fish, because, having no scales, they consider it unclean, but the Arab fishermen often use it as food. And there can be little doubt that it was this fish that was in our Saviour's mind when He said, near this spot, "If he ask a fish, will ye for a fish give him a serpent?" alluding to its serpent-like form.

James was thinking, doubtless, when he wrote the words of the text, of the remarkable fountains that sprung up near each other out of the earth, and flowed into the creek or inlet near Capernaum, where Jesus taught the people from the boat, and James the son of Zebedee, and

John his brother, were mending their nets when they were called to be His disciples. They furnished him with a most felicitous image. "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" Here were several streams flowing into one, but they did not differ in the quality of their waters. Some were not fresh and cold, and others tepid and brackish. They were all brackish and tepid, because they all arose out of the same rocky stratum and passed through the same volcanic soil. They were only different streams of the same fountain; and the same fountain could not in the nature of things, at the same place send forth sweet water and bitter. No fountain can yield salt water and fresh.

It is of the mouth or the tongue that the apostle is speaking. He seems himself to be a man of few words, slow to speak, and, whatever might be the reason, peculiarly sensitive to the guilt of sins of the tongue, making the bridling of a man's tongue the great test of his religion. He says most emphatically of a common experience that out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing, "these things ought not to be." It is an unnatural condition. You do not find in nature such contrarieties and inconsistencies. Nature is harmonious. Like causes always produce like results. The thistle does not produce figs but thistle down; and thorns do not produce grapes but sour sloes and crude bramble-berries. The fountain of sweet water pours forth always fresh water, and all the streams that flow from it are sweet and fresh. The fountain on the other hand that is salt and brackish supplies its streams with the same bitter ingredients, and you can trace them all along their course. All nature is under fixed and immovable law; and you can depend upon the harvest being like the seed you sow in kind. But man is unnatural when he breaks away from the law of his God.

He does things that are inconsistent with nature, and contrary to his own being and well-being ; and there is, consequently, a want of harmony between him and his surroundings. There is a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, bringing him into bondage to his lower nature ; and this strife within he carries into the world without. He is not at one with himself, and he cannot be at one with the creation around him. Destitute of unity he says and does the most inconsistent and contradictory things. He is double-tongued like the serpent, and therefore out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. The bifurcation is carried out in all his actions. He is double-eyed, having an eye to his own things most of all, even while he professes to have a single eye for the glory of God and the good of others.

The Epistle of James was written to Jewish converts living in Jerusalem and in the provinces. It was aimed at the peculiar vices which characterised the Jewish nature, and which the Christian converts still retained, notwithstanding the changes that had passed over them. The religion which they had abandoned was a conventional religion, a thing of forms and ceremonies and legal observances, which left the moral nature untouched, and did not appeal either to the heart or to the conscience. Consequently a man might be a strict Jew, and yet be guilty of falsehood and theft, and cheating his neighbour in business matters, and many other personal vices, without his religious character suffering in any way in the estimation of his fellows. This inconsistency exists among too many professors of religion in our own country, but it exists in a much more marked and extreme degree among Eastern Christians. They carry with them into the new faith the old habits and ideas, and they are not sensible of the incongruity. We feel instinctively that immoral ways are inconsistent with the

profession of the Christian religion, that if we name the name of Christ, we must depart from all gross iniquity at least ; but it takes much discipline and long training to convince Eastern Christians of this necessity. In the matter of truthfulness, more particularly, all the people of the East are woefully deficient, as compared with the people of the West and the North. They not only think it good to lie for religion's sake, but the lie may grow to any dimensions if it may serve their purpose or advance their interests. They have no respect for truth as truth, no reverence for God as the God of truth, and most certainly their morality does not rest in truth. A falsehood comes easily and naturally to their lips when it flatters a friend or deceives an enemy ; and it would seem that in the ordinary intercourse of society it is the base metal of deception that passes current ; while the sterling gold of honesty and truthfulness is nailed to the counter.

James strove to counteract this immoral tendency among the Hebrew Christians. They misconstrued Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, in maintaining that if they had only faith, good works were not required of them ; that if their belief was correct godliness was not necessary. And he showed them that faith without works, into which it ought in all cases to blossom and fruit, was not a life, but a mere formula of life, a dead thing. In his Epistle we see his own nature clearly mirrored—as a man of simple straightforwardness and integrity. So deeply imbued was he with the spirit of Jesus, that the topics of his ordinary discourses seem not to have been very different from those of his Master. Indeed there is a great deal of James's Epistle founded on sayings of our Lord, and seem an echo of His words or thoughts. The text, for instance, seems to have been suggested by Christ's parable of clean and unclean things. That parable was founded upon the ceremonial cleans-

ings of the Pharisees, and was occasioned by their accusations against Christ's disciples, that they ate with hands unwashed. He remembered how Jesus had said that it was not the things that entered into the body that defiled it, but the things that came out of it; that the evil heart of unbelief gave rise to evil thoughts, evil desires, and words and deeds which defiled a man. And therefore the Apostle said in turn, when he had to address the Christian converts, that their hearts were fountains which produced streams of the same character; that as their hearts were, so would be the thoughts and desires, the words and deeds, that came out of them.

Fountains always tell the history of their own origin. The water in them in every case is the same. It is rain-water from the clouds. But as it falls into the soil it becomes charged with the ingredients contained in it. It has the power of dissolving the materials of the rock through which it filters. It visits the secret labyrinths of the earth, where chemical forces are at work dividing the elements of the rocks, and these elements are mingled with the water, and impart to it its peculiar taste and properties. The water of springs is hardly ever met with in a state of absolute purity. The fountains of the Holy Land are all impregnated more or less with the qualities of the volcanic soil or limestone strata out of which they flow. Even in the purest wells the water seemed to me to taste a little brackish. The springs of Gerizim and the sources of the Jordan, had this saltish taste, and seemed soft and insipid, without any sparkling invigorating chill. And so it might be said that the hearts of the Jewish Christians were like their native soil. They imparted to their fountains a brackish taste. Their hearts were deceitful, and therefore they were not truthful in their conversation; they were not kindly affectioned one to another, speaking to each other words of gentleness

and purity. Their hearts were only partially renewed, and much of the old volcanic nature remained in them, and contaminated their speech and behaviour. One who could not be mistaken said that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. And if their hearts were bad they could not bring forth things opposite to themselves. They could only have one result and that always. They would inevitably utter bad words, lies, oaths, cursing, scandals. Should, therefore, the mouth make itself a brackish fountain by emitting bitter words, it could not to any purpose also emit the sweet streams of praise. If it tried to do so it would be sheer hypocrisy and pretence.

And how cruel is such inconsistency! It destroys your faith not only in the goodness of human nature, but also in the reality of the work of Divine grace. You cannot do your fellow-creature a greater injury than this. The world is false enough to him at all times; but if in the place of religion, where he expected to find only things that are pure and honest, and lovely, and of good report, he met with falsehood and dishonesty, and selfishness, and everything that was base and mean, how grievous would be the disappointment! Everything in existence would taste bitterly afterwards. You remember how the Israelites sank into a state of despair when they came to the fountain of Marah and found its waters undrinkable. Their parched tongues clove to the roofs of their mouths; and their torment was only aggravated by the sight of water that sparkled clear as crystal, but on account of its nauseous qualities was worse than useless. And reasoning by analogy, how terrible is the revulsion of feeling which you experience, when a friend in whom you have trusted as a follower of the Lord Jesus, has proved, by his evil speaking, a well of bitterness instead of a well of comfort. It is enough to make

you disbelieve in Divine goodness and human truthfulness ; enough to harden your heart against God and man. Sins of the tongue are indeed more numerous and deadly than any other sins. They cause more misery than all other sins put together—a misery that is entirely gratuitous and useless. And you do not wonder that the Apostle James should break out into such vehement language in condemning the vice ; or that the Psalmist should pray so earnestly to be hidden in the calm, secret place of the Most High from the strife of tongues.

On the other hand, there is no medicine so healing amid the troubles of this world, as the medicine of a tongue, attuned to the praise of God and the love of man. We are told of Him who spake as never man spake, and who had grace poured into His lips, that in the case of men full of disease, He healed them with His *word*. And so, by the word of sympathy and love, we, too, can perform miracles of healing in a world sorely vexed and afflicted by man's perversity. In Palestine I longed for the water that came pure and sparkling from the primitive rocks of my own country. The finest sight in all our northern land is a well bubbling up on the shoulder of a high mountain. The clouds of heaven distil their dew directly into it, and the granite basin, lined with the softest moss, holds the dimpled waters with immaculate purity. No stain of earth, no taint of rock, nothing but the transparent mountain air mingles with it, causing it to sparkle and murmur. It is pure as crystal and cold as ice. You stoop down in the hot noon, and drink long draughts of bliss from its cup. It puts new strength and vigour into your wearied and sun-scorched frame ; and you pursue your journey with fresh zest and interest. Such in all cases should be the fountain of Christian speech. It should come from

a heart which God's grace has made pure, and filled with the charity which thinketh no evil. It should communicate in its purity what it has received from heaven. We should be cheered and helped by the conversation of our fellow-Christians. Out of the mouths of those who profess to love the Lord Jesus and who sing the praise of God should proceed not idle or ill-natured gossip, not cynical or malicious criticism, not back-biting and slanderous depreciation, but kindly, generous words which never judge harshly, but always put the best construction upon everything—guileless, simple-hearted words which never leave room for suspecting a hidden purpose. Such a pure fountain of speech is, more than anything else which this world can give, a help to a Christian life. We drink from it and are strengthened and cheered, and go on our way rejoicing.

Not far from the tepid brackish Fountain of Capernaum there is another which is cool and sweet, and pleasant to the taste. The rock out of which the two separate and entirely different fountains flow is the same kind of volcanic rock, but it imparts to the one its bitter ingredients, while it does not to the other ; the water from the clouds percolating through it uncontaminated. What is the reason of this? It is some change in the structure of the rock. In the one case the rock is soft and porous, and easily parts with its materials ; in the other it is hard and compact, and is not easily dissolved by the water. And so it is with the human heart. It is the same human heart ; but, unchanged by grace, it imparts its own native uncleanness to everything that comes out of it, so that its speech becomes a brackish fountain, from whose bitterness every one turns away with disappointment and disgust. Whereas, on the other hand, renewed by grace, it hardens itself against all evil influences from without, and returns the waters of heaven, the dews of grace, as

purely as it receives them, without any taint of its own selfishness and corruption ; and its speech becomes a fountain of living water—the centre of all the beauty, and joy, and life of the neighbourhood.

The bitter fountain at Jericho was healed by the Prophet casting into it the cruse of salt ; and the nauseous waters of Marah were made sweet by casting into them the tree which God pointed out to Moses in the desert. And so this bitter fountain of our heart that spreads desolation around, that causes disappointment and pain to all about us, can only be healed by putting into it the salt of Christ's sorrows and sufferings for human sin, the Cross which bore the guilt of human transgression. If we realise, not by the mere cold barren conviction of the intellect, but by the warm assent of the heart, that He who knew no sin was made sin, yea, a curse, for us, in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, then we cannot take pleasure in doing or saying that which caused the sufferings and death of the Son of God, and which they were meant to prevent and remove. Our heart will hate everything that is opposed to His holy will. Naming the name of Christ, the name of Him who hath done such great things for us, that holy name will consecrate our lips, will touch them as with a live coal from off the altar of His sacrifice, and purify and ennoble all our utterances. We shall depart from all iniquity, and show forth in all we do and say the praises of our God. It is true of grace, as it is of nature, that its products must be like itself. The heart that is filled with the love of Jesus can only utter love ; the lips that have the grace of Jesus upon them can only express what is gracious.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BELLS OF THE HORSES.

“In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD.”—*Zech.* xiv. 20.

THROUGHOUT our journey in Palestine, the members of our party kept nearly always the same relative position in regard to each other. We rode in Indian file along the narrow tracks, and I had therefore ample opportunity of observing the harness and mountings of my neighbour's horse directly before me. I could not but notice that a large blue bead of glass was attached to the tail of this horse; for that object was constantly before my eye. My own horse was not decorated in the same way, and several other horses in the cavalcade were similarly undistinguished. But there were more than half a dozen horses with this characteristic appendage, sometimes attached to the tail and sometimes forming part of the harness. On inquiry, I found that this blue bead was not intended for a mere ornament, but for a very practical purpose—to protect the horses that wore it from the evil eye, which is supposed to be exceedingly common and baleful in Palestine, as in other superstitious countries. The blue bead is worn as a counter-charm, because persons who have blue or light eyes are supposed to be

notorious for possessing this evil power. Whether the horses that had the blue bead attached to them were considered more valuable than those without it, and were therefore more exposed to the evil influence in question, or whether there was a vicarious protection extended by them over the unguarded horses going along with them, I was not in a position to say ; but I observed all over Palestine and Syria the same strange custom.

The inhabitants of the east are very fond of their horses. They are often very beautiful creatures, perfectly docile and wonderfully intelligent ; and, being brought up in close association with their owners, they are to them what dogs are to us. They love to deck them with gay trappings and marks of ownership ; and, as they believe in evil genii and Satanic powers that work mischief among men and animals, they use certain charms and amulets against their spells upon the horses. These amulets, attached to some part of the horse's body or its harness, defend it also from the malicious eye of the enemy or the covetous eye of the thief. The commonest and most important of these charms or symbols are, besides the large blue bead I have alluded to, a flat disc of metal on the top of the head between the ears, which represents the sun, and a crescent on the forehead for the moon. These forms are combined with stars worn on the breast of the horse, on the martingale, and on the left side just behind the shoulder, and are generally in odd numbers, such as three, five, or seven. They were used by the ancient Greeks and Romans in connection with the worship of the sun, to which the horse was dedicated ; and also with the worship of Diana, the moon, who, as the great huntress, and the patron of hunters and others to whom horses were valuable helps, took them under her protection by the use of her symbol of the crescent moon. Such charms were called by the Romans

phalaræ ; and we see them constantly represented on old monuments, carved with pictures of Roman armies and processions. They were used exclusively as amulets by the ancients ; and at the present day the superstitious Neapolitans, and the inhabitants of other parts of southern and eastern Europe, attach them to their horses for the avowed purpose of guarding them against the evil eye. In England these symbols are still used, exactly the same as we find them on the horses carved on Trajan's Column in Rome seventeen hundred years ago. But the metal crests, with or without a star, which saddlers call "face-brasses," attached to the harness of cart and waggon horses, have utterly lost their old significance, and are regarded merely as ornaments, on a par with the flowers and ribbons with which the heads and tails of horses are decorated at cattle shows and on other gala occasions. But however much their ancient superstitious use may have been forgotten, there can be no doubt that these brass ornaments, or modern *phalaræ*, are survivals of the old charms against the evil eye.

And the same may be said of the little swinging bells on the top of the head, called "flyers," with tufts of hair sometimes attached to them, with whose jingling music, heard constantly in the streets of continental towns, and less frequently in our own, we are all familiar. The musical sounds of these bells were meant, at first, not for enjoyment or merriment, but to clear the air and scare away evil spirits hovering around, that might be ready to do an injury to the horse and the driver—bells being supposed to be more effectual for this purpose than any other object. In Bible lands there are no draught horses ; but the baggage animals, such as mules, camels, or asses, are always supplied with bells. And they are used for various purposes—to encourage and enliven the animals by their sound, to keep them together over trackless

plains and misty mountain passes, and to enable a stray animal to rejoin the caravan by following the jingling sound. But besides these utilitarian purposes, they also serve a superstitious purpose, and are supposed to guard the caravan from evil spirits more to be dreaded than even robbers or beasts of prey. When the Empress Helena discovered, in Jerusalem, the nails which were said to have fastened the Saviour's hands to the cross, she presented one of them to her son, Constantine the Great, and he converted it into a bit for his war-horse; not meaning to desecrate it by such a use, but to employ it as an amulet for the protection of himself and his horse in battle—just as he used the cross that appeared to him in the sky as the standard of his army. And the Christians of the time said that this was a direct fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah, "In that day shall there be on the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord."

It is a remarkable fact that the pattern of the rude square-shaped cattle-bells of Switzerland, which make such a delightfully mellow music on the Alpine pastures, was derived from the Celtic church-bells which the disciples of St. Columba carried along with them when they preached the gospel and founded monasteries like that of St. Gall on the continent of Europe. Some of these quaint old bells, used in the primitive church service of Scotland, still survive in remote parts of our own land and in the north-east of Switzerland; and it is a striking thought that the same kind of bells that used to summon the worshippers of God to the social meeting, and to consecrate the ordinances of the Church, are now used in another land to keep cattle together, and to enable the owners to find them in the wild weather of the mountains. An interesting relation is thus formed between the pastoral office which has to do with the

spiritual care of human beings, and that which concerns itself with the cattle which constituted their primitive wealth.

All these associations with the words of Zechariah give a deeper meaning to his prediction. His words according to the usual interpretation imply that a time was coming when the true religion would be universal, when the commonest objects of everyday use would share in the consecration of the holy vessels of the sanctuary, and the inscription, "Holiness to the Lord," which had hitherto been confined to the golden plate attached to the mitre of the high priest, would be engraved upon the bells that jingled on the forehead of the horses. But in the light of the preceding explanation the prediction signifies much more than the mere sanctification of common things, turning them from a secular to a sacred purpose, and indicates a greater triumph for the true religion. It implies that what had been used for a superstitious purpose in connection with the worship of idols, would now be used only in connection with the glory of the living and true God. The *meniskoi*, or *lunidæ*, which had placed the horses that wore them as part of their trappings under the protection of the false gods of the heathen, would now put them under the guardianship of the God of Israel. Only the living and true God could effectually protect His own creatures, defend them from all evil influences, and bless them for their own good and for the service of man. Thus, what had been used as charms and amulets by ignorant and superstitious ages, would have, in a highly religious and enlightened age, an entirely different significance given to them, and would be used to show forth the awful holiness of the Being who would tolerate no idol upon His throne.

It is an interesting train of reflection how horses have been employed in religion. They figured prominently

in the ceremonies of ancient idolatry. We read about "the horses of the sun," which belonged to the Amorite worship, and which the kings of Judah had introduced into the temple in the apostate days of Manasseh and his predecessors. These sacred horses were either sculptured out of stone or moulded in metal, and occupied a position at each side of the temple gate, similar to that of the winged bulls or lions in the Assyrian and Persian temples. Josiah, in his thorough work of reformation, took away these idolatrous effigies. The Massegetæ and other nations sacrificed horses to the sun; and in the Island of Rhodes, horses were cast into the sea in honour of the solar god. Pagan idolaters were distinguished from Christians by the one eating the flesh of the horse as a sacramental token of their allegiance to this sun-god, and the other refusing to partake of that which was offered to idols.

Among the Scandinavians the horse was sacred to Odin; and there is in the south of England the gigantic figure of a horse cut out of the green turf on the hillside, exposing the white chalk lines beneath, seen at a great distance, which the ancient inhabitants used, at stated intervals, to keep clear of grass and weeds, with solemn rites in honour of the Northern god. Over the portico of St. Mark's Church in Venice are the four famous bronze horses brought from Constantinople by the Venetians. It may be considered a survival of this ancient sacredness attached to the horse, that the cab-drivers of Paris used to place on their carriages an image of St. Fiacre, one of the Columban saints, who, in the seventh century, was driven by missionary zeal to preach the gospel in France, and to regard him as their especial patron. A cab or hackney carriage is still known in Paris, from that circumstance, as a *fiacre*. It is a memorial of the old dedication of cab

and horse to God. And that remarkable ceremony of the annual blessing, about the middle of January, of the horses of Rome by the Roman Catholic Church, is a further survival of the old superstition. This is one of the most popular festivals of the Roman calendar, and it continues, not for a day only, like the majority of Christian festivals, but for eight days. During that time, all the horses in Rome are brought to the door of the Church of St. Maria Maggiore, which is gaily decorated for the occasion; and the priest, in the name of St. Anthony, the patron of animals, sprinkles holy water over each horse in turn, and utters the Latin blessing, "May this animal receive thy benediction, through which it may be preserved bodily, and be freed from all evil through the intercession of blessed St. Antonio!" The Roman peasant still clings to the pleasant belief that the saint has power to keep his horse from the influence of the evil eye and from all harm during the rest of the year.

We call all this superstition born of darkness and ignorance, but the feeling that is at the bottom of it is not so far wrong, if we think deeply of it. People in all ages have wished to bring their live possessions under the guardianship of the same heavenly powers as themselves. They have recognized the lower animals to be their poor relations, formed on the same model, and sharing with them in the strange mystery of life. They have used animals as their sacrifices and symbols of religion for this reason, believing that their death could atone for human guilt and propitiate the Divine favour. Hinduism considers all animal life sacred, and will not injure or destroy it on any consideration. Mohammedanism is especially kind to animals; and even the ownerless dogs in the streets of Eastern cities are protected and fed, and on the tombs of pious Moslems

hollows are made in order to be filled with the rain, from which the birds and animals around may drink. And why should Christianity be the only religion to exclude animals from its tender mercies? Why should we not believe that God meant us to preach the gospel to every creature, not only to every human being, but also to every animal?—not, of course, by words, but by actions which they can understand and appreciate. St. Francis of Assisi, who loved all God's creatures because he loved the Lord supremely, called them his brothers and sisters, "*Carissimi fratelli*." He did not regard these innocent beings as beyond the limits of God's covenant, simply to be used by man for his pleasure or profit, and then to perish unheeded. He believed that where God had put life, He had put some instinctive consciousness of Himself; and therefore he looked upon them as God's voiceless choir, who know His Name and sing His praises perpetually. Would that the beautiful childlike piety of the great Franciscan saint, so near to the heart of the great bountiful All-Father, characterized the religion of every Christian!

The best way surely to fulfil the prophet's gracious prediction that "holiness to the Lord" should be upon the bells of the horses, is to use our horses as if they were holy to the Lord, as if they were given to us by God for our use, under responsibility to Him for the way in which we treat them. One of the most precious gifts which God has bestowed upon us is the horse. How much of our civilization do we owe to his wonderful copartnership with us! How should we have reached this height of comfort and refinement without his help! The fewness of horses on the American continent before its discovery, and their total absence in Australia, remarkably tally with the lower state of man in these regions; and having to hunt without dog or horse has diverted the

nervous energy of American savages to the eye and nose, and correspondingly lowered the force of their minds. It was supposed that the introduction of the steam-engine would entirely supersede the labour of horses; but the enormous development of railway and other steam traffic all over the world has created a far larger demand for it than ever before, and opened up new ways of employing it. Mere mechanical force will not entirely avail for the needs of man; he requires the assistance of animal power that can be applied in a docile and intelligent manner. And to the end of the world, he will be dependent upon the horse to enable him to develop the resources of the earth, and make it what God meant it to be.

What a noble creature the horse is! It is the very perfection of animal form and structure, so strong yet so docile, so intelligent yet so obedient, with its highly sensitive organization and its rhythmic action! I never realized its admirable qualities so much as during my late journey through Palestine. This never was a country adapted for horses, and they hardly ever figured in the agricultural uses or in the wars of the ancient Israelites. But, notwithstanding this, it was wonderful how our beautiful Arab steeds carried us unweariedly day after day over long stretches of country, where the bare rocky hills and the rough stony paths were as difficult as they could possibly be, always planting their feet deliberately in the safest places with the utmost sagacity, as if they knew the responsibility that lay upon them. We all got attached to our horses during this long journey, and were loth to part from them in the end. We owed them a debt of gratitude which, it was pathetic to think, the limitation of their nature would not allow us to pay as we could have wished. I felt during this experience how much a horse and his rider may become one in sympathy,

and the good or bad impressions of the master may be faithfully reflected in his beast. I mused much at this time upon the marvellous history of the horse. Science has recently enabled us to trace its origin and pedigree in a way we could not have known before. Instead of being specially created in the manner that Milton describes—full-formed at once—we learn that the horse of the present day is descended from ancestral types going back through several geological epochs, which exhibit less and less resemblance to the existing form, and more and more relationship to the other vertebrate animals. We find no less than five striking modifications of form, to which different names have been given, beginning with the oldest form of horse known to us, the *orohippus* of the Eocene period. This primitive form had four complete toes in the fore feet and three in the hind. Then succeeded another form which had three complete toes in both fore and hind feet ; and thus the horse's foot was developed with diminishing toes, until at last it had only one digit—the middle finger or toe, immensely elongated and very strong, the nail covering it being converted into a hoof. This last form of foot, which causes the horse to differ from all other vertebrate animals, is admirably adapted for swift running over hard ground, and for long and fatiguing journeys.

And surely such a method of making the horse by one grand process of gradual evolution, instead of by means of numerous acts of special creation, shows in a wonderful manner the wisdom and beneficence of the Creator. We see how God had man's welfare in view all the time as He brought the animal, in successive ages, during which He was preparing the earth for man's abode, nearer and nearer to the perfection of its present form, and made it better and better adapted for man's use. When man sinned, and felt the consequences of sin in

the various diseases and distempers of the body, God, by a gracious and loving forethought, had provided the necessary medicines for healing them in the specific plants and minerals created from the foundation of the world. When God issued His command to men to subdue the earth, He had already ordained the means for its accomplishment. He had been for untold ages storing up in the bowels of the earth the fuel by whose potential energy, in these last days, the powers of nature were to be harnessed to man's chariot and to do his work. When God passed sentence upon man, after his fall, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," He had been preparing an animal which should help him to plough his fields, and carry home his harvests, and lighten in a thousand ways the heavy burden of his toil. Thus the gift of the horse is part of that marvellous correlation of things by which, through Divine grace, the curse of sin was to issue in a nobler blessing, and the fall of man to become his grandest recovery and education.

It was a horse-riding people that started the first migrations of the human race. Far back, beyond the earliest Assyrian dynasties, we find traces of the primitive Accadians, the first equestrian race of whom we have any knowledge; and they conquered the regions of the Tigris and Euphrates by the help of their horses, and introduced the earliest elements of civilisation into Western Asia. And the invasions of the Hittites, who seem to have been a similar Mongolian race, issuing from the steppes and pasture-lands of Central Asia—the native home of the horse—and conquering Egypt, Palestine, and Asia Minor, introduced the horse into these countries, and laid the foundation of much of their subsequent greatness and power. And it is a significant circumstance that, at the opening of each of the

four seals of the "book" in Revelation, the wars, famines, and pestilences through which the destinies of the earth are to be fulfilled—which are necessary to destroy the kingdom of evil and to establish the kingdom of righteousness—are introduced and personified as riders on white, red, black, and pale horses. The horse is thus said to prepare the way of the Lord upon the earth. And the final overthrow of all evil affecting man and the creation, and the final triumph of all good in the human and animal world, through the righteousness of the Redeemer, are represented by a sublime vision of Him who, in the days of His humiliation, brought salvation to Jerusalem, meekly seated on the foal of an ass, and now is seen riding on a white horse, the symbol of triumph and power, accompanied by the armies of heaven on white horses, having conquered, not by His sword, but by His blood.

When we reflect upon all these things, consider the marvellous pedigree of the horse, and his wise gradual adaptation to human wants; when we remember the great part which he has had in civilising and subduing the world; when we realise the debt of gratitude we owe to him for having so patiently and obediently during all these ages laid all his strength and sagacity at our disposal, and sacrificed himself in our service;—surely we are bound by every tender tie and solemn motive to treat him with considerate kindness. To give him his due of food and rest, to use him with thoughtful care, is to keep him from harm far more effectually than by putting on his harness and trappings any amount of charms and amulets. The eye of a good master watching over his welfare continually is the best safeguard against the evil eye of wicked men or wicked spirits. Inscribing our own holiness

to the Lord on his bells, letting him feel the full moral benefit of our Christian religion in all our treatment of him, we do a more acceptable service to God than if we consecrated our horse to Him with a religious ceremonial.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAY TO DAMASCUS.

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus : and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.”—*Acts ix. 3.*

THE conversion of the Apostle Paul was the greatest event in the history of the Christian Church. It was undertaken by our Lord Himself, who appeared personally on the scene, haloed by the glory of heaven. There are many aspects in which this subject may be viewed, each of the deepest significance. It may be regarded as the last miracle of our Lord, wrought, not in His state of humiliation, like the other miracles, but in His state of exaltation ; it may be looked at as the result and the reward of His finished work, summing up in itself and crowning all the characteristics of the other miracles ; it may be considered as the typical miracle which survives while all the other miracles have vanished. But important as these aspects may be, I wish on the present occasion to turn away from them, and to confine our attention exclusively to the significance of the place where our Lord appeared to St. Paul.

We do not know the precise spot where this occurred, but tradition localises it at Salahijeh, an outer spur of the Lebanon range, at the foot of huge limestone cliffs, where

the traveller first catches sight of the boundless plain and the magnificent city of Damascus set in the midst of it. It is a place of pilgrimage to the inhabitants, and is consecrated by the caves and tombs of Moslem saints. Here, they say, Abraham had the unity of God revealed to him. One moment the famished eye sees on every side nothing but the grey aridity of limestone rock, without a leaf to enliven it ; and the next it gazes enraptured upon an ocean of infinitely varied foliage. For hours Paul had been passing through the dreariest mountain scenery, whose sterile crags, bleaching in the hot sunshine, fatigued body and mind ; and now all at once there rushed upon his vision, prepared for it, as it were, by the obliteration of even the memory of any green thing, a scene so strangely fair that it seemed as if a new and radiant world had opened up before him—the world-old city of Damascus, embosomed in the brightest verdure and bloom, a pearl surrounded by emeralds, the “eye of all the East.” Mahomet, in after years, it is said, captivated by the sight, declined to go farther than this spot, declaring that, as there was but one paradise, his should not be in this world. It pleases us to think that, with a poetic fitness, this was the place where Paul and his escort of soldiers were arrested by the supernatural vision. He was permitted to behold the city of his destination ; and we can imagine what a deep impression that surprise of exuberant verdure must have produced upon a mind like his—and then his eyes were blinded for a time to all earthly scenes by the dazzling glory of heaven. The outward flash of light penetrated the inner darkness that had so long shut out Divine love ; the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, shone into his soul, convincing him of personal sin, and of a righteousness not his own ; and the hard-hearted, intolerant Pharisee confessed himself the humble, penitent

disciple of the crucified Nazarene, whose name he had so bitterly hated.

It was near Damascus, in full view of the city. The journey of the persecutor was almost ended ; the object of that journey was about to be accomplished. He was on the very verge of perpetrating his crowning enormities against the Christians, ere God laid His hand upon him, and made him a Christian himself. The question arises—Why was he not arrested sooner? Why all this waste of time and energy and means? Why should he have been allowed to travel for so many days, with such a dreadful purpose in his mind, and almost to reach the place where it was to be carried out? Would it not have been better if God had placed providential obstacles in the way of his setting out on the journey at all? Or, if allowed to set out, might not the vision have appeared to him at an earlier stage of the journey? So we reason, but this was not God's design. We are expressly told that "as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven." There, and there only, could the supernatural occurrence have taken place. It was Divinely pre-arranged, and there were wise reasons for it which easily suggest themselves to our minds.

The vision that appeared to Paul at Damascus may be compared to the Divine call of the old prophets ; and there was a remarkable harmony between the external circumstances and the nature of his mission. Isaiah was consecrated by a vision of the Lord, seen in the Temple of Jerusalem, in the midst of the sacred symbols, by the help of which alone could God be appropriately worshipped, and earthly manifestations of Him be reasonably expected. In his time, and during all the previous ages, priestly services had been required for any Divine communication, and God was confined to a temple made

with hands, as to a special, sacred spot. But during the Captivity, when banished from the holy city and the centre of the national faith, a revelation of God was given without any intervention of sacred rites, and in connection with no religious shrine. Ezekiel received his heavenly vision beside the river Chebar, in Babylon; and the Jews were taught that the world was God's great temple, that Jehovah Himself was the abiding sanctuary of His people, wherever they were. This great truth was proclaimed in clearer and fuller light when, after the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem, the last captivity of the Jews took place, and they were expelled from all the local symbols of their faith, to become wanderers on the face of the earth. Henceforth there was to be no fixed shrine of religion; the horizon of humanity was to be widened; and God was to be no longer known by the exclusive names of "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob," but as "the God of the families of the whole earth."

The way was prepared for this during the lifetime of our Lord, who, though He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet, nevertheless, within the confines of the Holy Land, ministered to Roman centurion, Syro-Phœnician woman, and Samaritan outcast, devoted the largest portion of His public work to Galilee of the Gentiles, and said that the Son of Man was glorified when the Greeks came to inquire for Him at the feast. He was crucified outside the walls of the priestly city. After His resurrection He left the narrow sacerdotal country of the exclusive Jews, and went before His disciples to Galilee; and there, far from the local centre of the Jewish faith, He gave them His commission to preach the gospel to every creature. And now, after the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Gentile proselytes at Pentecost, the successful preaching of the gospel in

Samaria, and the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, an apostle is raised up specially, not to lose his individuality in the ranks of the other apostles, but to stand apart from them and in advance of them, to minister, not to the Jews, but to the Gentiles. This apostle was specially prepared for this new mission by being born in a Gentile city, educated in all the culture of the Greeks, and under the protection of Roman citizenship. And though all his own Jewish prejudices were entirely against such a mission, God overruled them for the more complete carrying out of His own gracious design. He chose of his own accord to go into strange cities in pursuit of the followers of Jesus; and there near the oldest of all the Gentile cities, far from Jerusalem and from the hallowed precincts of the temple, this Pharisee of the Pharisees was called to spread far and wide the new gospel—that God had also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. The Saviour, whose own personal ministry was confined within the bounds of the Land of Israel, appeared to Paul beyond these limits. Unlike the other apostles, Paul saw not Jesus in the flesh, as a Jew living in Jerusalem or Palestine, amid the ordinary circumstances of Jewish life, but as the risen and glorified Redeemer of all men, for ever lifted above all local or national associations. If left to himself, Paul would not have selected such a spot in which to receive a Divine call, nor would he antecedently have desired that it should come to him in such a form. And being thus the turning-point of his life, reversing all his previous history, and overturning all his deepest and most sacred convictions, the heavenly vision cannot obviously be regarded, according to the views of some sceptics, as a mere objective reflection of his own thoughts and desires. It was what it claims to be—an absolutely true revelation of the Lord Jesus; and in no other place would it have been so suitable as

near Damascus, where Abraham rested for the last time before entering the Holy Land. To that storied spot came the Patriarch, in fulfilment of the Divine command which summoned him to go *into* the Land of Promise, that he might be there the father of the chosen people, educated under God's own eye to become the missionaries of mankind. To that storied spot came the apostle, in fulfilment of the Divine command which summoned him to go *out* of the Land of Promise, and preach the results of the special training of the chosen race to all nations. Here the universal mission of the Father of the faithful and of the Apostle of the Gentiles coincided, and received its seal in the heavenly revelation.

But not only was it suitable that he who was to be the Apostle of the Gentiles should receive his heavenly call outside Jewish territory; it was also providentially intended that his personal discipline and preparation for the call should be carried on during his journey to the spot. Into the holy work, as he regarded it, of extirpating the new heresy, Paul threw himself with characteristic ardour. Being probably one of those belonging to Cilicia, Paul's native province, who disputed with Stephen, and "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spake," he helped to stir up the populace against him, to bring him before the public tribunal, and, by means of the evidence of false witnesses, to procure his condemnation to death. So far from being convinced and subdued by the angel-face, the patient bearing, and the spiritual doctrine of Stephen, his religious frenzy was only goaded into greater fury. The blood of the first martyr, shed by him and his fellow-persecutors, envenomed the wound of his conscience. There must have been a sore and perplexing struggle going on during this crisis in the soul of the fierce zealot. Under the pretence that he was doing God service, there must have been the

deep-lying remonstrance of his better and more enlightened nature. There was a contradiction in his soul against the course he was pursuing. The man was at cross-purposes with himself, and, as usually happens, "he vented his bitter unrest and ill feeling upon outward objects." He "breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"; he "made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison."

In this fury of religious excitement, stifling all the nobler feelings and native tendernesses within him, he set out to visit Damascus, one of the "strange cities" to which he had undertaken to follow the Christian disciples. I have travelled over the same ground, and know by experience how formidable was the enterprise which he had taken in hand. I can fully estimate the fervour of the zeal which carried him over two hundred miles of the roughest and most fatiguing roads in all the world, and was not quenched by the numberless difficulties and dangers which he must have met with on the way, and which must have been far greater than they are now. He was furnished with all the necessary mandates from the authorities in Jerusalem, and he expected to be helped in his work of apprehending the Christians by the authorities of Damascus, who bore no love to them. Thus all his schemes were well planned for the carrying out of his stern purpose. But there was something within him that seemed to oppose and condemn this persecuting zeal of his. His conscience was athirst for righteousness, and it kept ever suggesting to him that this was not the way to obtain that for which he was so ardently seeking. Ill at ease, with a law in his heart struggling with the law of his mind, we can picture his journey to Damascus as being similar to the journey of Balaam to obey the behests of Balak, against which his

truer self rebelled. And just as the angel of the Lord interfered to prevent the fulfilment of Balaam's wicked purpose, so the Lord interfered to hinder the carrying out of Paul's dreadful mission. He was, indeed, allowed to journey on until he came near to Damascus, but there his course was suddenly stopped.

Had Paul been prevented from setting out on the way to Damascus ; had he been miraculously converted by the vision of heaven in Jerusalem immediately after the death of Stephen ; or had he been allowed to go but a little way on his journey, then the moral development of his character would have been prematurely arrested. It was necessary that the conflict between the good and evil in his soul should go on, that he might see clearly into the depths of his nature, and gain that experience and knowledge of the heart which should afterwards be of such great use to him in teaching the Church of Christ. In the parallel case of Balaam, God allowed the Eastern prophet to go on in his self-chosen course, that he might find out on the way, by experience, what he had rejected by intuition. We see how his moral discipline is carried out as he journeys, how by communings with his own mind, and obstacles placed in the way, the confusion of his thoughts clarifies itself, and right principles emerge and assert themselves out of wrong impulses and evil lusts and affections. The angel of the Lord confronts him, his own dumb ass speaks, and rebukes his madness, conscience begins to work, and he resolves, if speak he must to Balak, he will only speak what is true. It becomes increasingly clear to him that nothing could justify the cursing of those whom God had blessed ; and he begins to contrive plans by which he may retain his honesty of conviction, and yet not forfeit the king's bribes of gifts and honours. Thus as a stream that rises polluted from its source purifies itself if allowed to flow sufficiently far, by

depositing its sediment along its channel, so the journey which God allowed Balaam to take was made the means of a humbling and purifying self-revelation to him, and gave him an opportunity of repenting of his evil intentions. And the fact that in the end he blessed Israel altogether, and pronounced the wonderful prophecy of its destiny, was doubtless owing to the moral discipline of his journey.

So was it, we may well believe, with Paul. God separated him for a time from the narrowing prejudices of his Jewish life in Jerusalem, brought him northwards by successive stages, through territories that became less and less exclusively Jewish, and shaded on the borders into the Gentile world, and finally shut him out altogether from the associations of the Holy Land. And doubtless as he journeyed on by the high-road which led from Egypt to Syria under God's wide open sky, and among scenes of nature that became fairer and grander as he advanced, the new influences could not but produce their own softening effect upon a mind so susceptible as his. Passing through Capernaum, thoughts of Christ's marvellous life and work so specially connected with that region would be suggested to him, and would help to hasten the great crisis of his life. The mountains of Lebanon, as he crossed them, would be to him a grander revelation of God, and would tend to lift his thoughts above all the narrow boundaries of men. The wonderful incidents connected with Stephen's martyrdom; the strange and significant words of the new religion spoken by him and by other persecuted Christians; the reports regarding the life and death and resurrection of Jesus which circulated among his associates:—all these things, which at the time and in his ordinary mode of life produced no impression upon him, recurred to his mind with a singular suggestiveness now that he was at leisure

to reflect upon them. Away from the sustaining example of others, with nothing to distract or prejudice his mind, grievous doubts of the righteousness of the cause in which he was engaged harassed him. And God allowed him to journey on with his evil purpose almost as far as Damascus, that in the inward conflict between his passions and prejudices, and the promptings of that in him which was highest and best, he might come to know himself as he truly was, in his weakness as well as in his strength; that he might see clearly what was evil in his nature as well as what was good, and so be prepared for the Divine revelation and commission that were about to be given to him. And we see in the promptitude and docility of spirit with which Paul listened while Jesus spoke, what the long journey from Jerusalem to Damascus had done for him. Without that journey he would not have received so meekly the heavenly message, nor submitted himself so readily to the religion of the despised Nazarene. We may also suppose that the conversion of the persecutor was so contrived as to time and place, that he could be within easy reach of Christian friends, who could guide him in his blindness and helplessness to a fuller knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And as in the case of Paul, so often in the dealings of His providence and grace, God allows matters to go very far without interfering; and the reason for the delay will be found to be as satisfactory if searched out in all such cases, as it was in Paul's experience. Scripture is full of illustrations, many of them of a very remarkable kind. Abraham was allowed to journey three days to Mount Moriah with the purpose of offering up the child of his affections and of God's promise. God did not enforce a hasty decision from him. Sufficient time was given to him to change his purpose if he felt inclined to do so; sufficient time was also given to prove the strength and

sincerity of his purpose. He and his son Isaac were allowed to climb the hill together, the father carrying the sacred fire, and the unsuspecting son the wood of the sacrifice. The altar was built, the wood was laid upon it, the innocent victim was bound with cords upon it, and Abraham was on the point of raising the knife to plunge it into the heart of his son. Then, but not till then, did the cry, "Abraham, Abraham!" arrest the descending stroke, and the angel of God interfere to spare the life of Isaac and to provide a substitute. And just as in Paul's case we see what the three days' journey, with its alternations of feeling, its conflict of doubt and faith, of human love and Divine commanding, had done for his spiritual development. During that period of intensest living, the heat of his mental struggle ripened soul-conviction more rapidly than during months and years of common experience. He was spiritually led up the heights of faith as he physically climbed the heights of Mount Moriah; and when he was prepared to proceed to the utmost conclusion of the long tragedy, it was not required at his hands, because he had already penetrated into the inmost heart of sacrifice, and had already given up Isaac in the submission of his human will to the Divine command. The real process of sacrifice had been going on within himself all the time; and therefore the outer final act was not necessary when the inner process was completed. So, too, it was only in the fourth watch of the night, when the disciples in the boat, during the height of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, had ceased rowing in despair, and had given up all hope of safety, that Jesus appeared, and stilled the tempest, and brought them safely to land. And this withdrawal of Jesus from them to the last moment left room for the undoing, by means of suffering, of the hardening effect which the miracle of the loaves and fishes had produced upon them, and for the dawning

on their minds of the revelation of His true character, causing them to come and worship Him, saying, "Of a truth Thou art the Son of God."

In our own modern life, dim and narrow as is our knowledge, we can nevertheless discern equally satisfactory reasons for God's allowing things to go very far without interfering. God has His own times and seasons and places. Our Saviour clearly indicated this when He spoke so often about "His hour." Even Jesus, in His subordination to the Father in the work of grace, was, so to speak, restrained by the appointed time of God. He refused to work a miracle when asked to do so; He delayed to go up to Jerusalem to the feast; He hid Himself from the multitude, because, as He said, "His hour was not yet come." Development is the law of grace as well as of nature. The fruits of the earth require a certain amount of sunlight and heat to ripen them; but it is not a matter of indifference whether the heat and light be spread over many or few months. In both cases, indeed, there will be a harvest produced of similar appearance; but the quality of it will vary. We know that fruit becomes more delicious exactly in proportion to the time it takes to grow ripe. The apples of Palestine are far inferior to those of England, because the heat of the climate brings them too soon to maturity; and no one who has eaten the almost tasteless hastily-grown strawberries of Italy will compare them with those of Northern lands, in which the slow patience of the favouring heavens has stored up a rich piquancy of flavour. Forced fruits and vegetables have never the qualities of those which are allowed to await their own proper season of ripening. The century's sleep of the aloe is followed by a sudden floral development that is colossal, commensurate with the long period that it took to flower. And so it is necessary for the maturing

of God's people, for the bringing out and educating of all that is best in them, for making them to abound in every good word and work, that their trials should be prolonged for a certain period of time. If God stepped in to deliver them at the beginning of the trial, they would know nothing of His moral discipline. The depths of their nature would not be revealed to themselves; the good as well as the evil in them would not be made manifest. There would be no room for the exercise of faith, which, though the gift of God, requires to be trained by trusting in the wise providence which is waiting unseen for the right moment to act. There would be no opportunity for exercising patience, which must tarry the Lord's leisure, grow strong by waiting, and have its perfect work of enduring. Love would lack that tenderness and fulness which it often requires years of suffering to produce; and the character would want that roundness and mellowness which the trying alternations of hope and fear in the protracted struggles of life alone can develop. There was a special time and place appointed for Paul's revelation from heaven. It could happen at no other time, and in no other place. And so there is a special time and place for our enlightening and deliverance. We must trust God to know Himself the most suitable place and the most suitable circumstances. And as in our journey of life we come near the Damascus of our extremity, suddenly there will shine round about us a light from heaven. Only let us be solicitous, when the light comes, to make the same good use of it which the Apostle Paul did. Let it be the cause of our living no more unto ourselves, but unto God.

CHAPTER X.

THE ESCAPE OF ST. PAUL FROM DAMASCUS.

In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me : and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.”—2 *Cor.* xi. 32, 33.

ONE day at Damascus I visited the Bab Kaisân or Great Gate, which is situated at the south-eastern angle of the city wall. This is one of the oldest of the gates of Damascus, and has been closed and built up for more than seven hundred years. Its stones are finer and more carefully chiselled than those of the other parts of the wall ; and at the top there is a kind of barbican or projecting structure of apparently the same age. Tradition points to this gate, and the overhanging barbican, as the place where the Apostle Paul was let down by his friends through a window in a basket, and so escaped out of the hands of the infuriated Jews. Close by is the reputed tomb of St. George, with a lamp continually burning in it ; the “Good Janitor,” as he is called, who according to tradition assisted Paul to escape, and was in consequence himself put to death. And a little farther beyond is the Christian cemetery, where Buckle, the famous author of the *History of Civilisation* is buried.

To the stone erected over the tomb of St. George all the coffins of those laid in this Christian cemetery are brought before their interment, that the saint may plead with heaven for their escape from purgatory.

I was greatly interested in this venerable relic ; for tradition in regard to it is less uncertain than it is in regard to other spots, supposed to be connected with the residence of the great Apostle in Damascus. There seemed to be no objection to its authenticity. And the very possibility of its being the true site of such a romantic incident invested it with a wonderful fascination. The stones were sufficiently aged and worn to have dated from apostolic days. In that respect they are different from the stones of other parts of the wall, which show signs of having been several times renewed. This too is the direction in which Paul would have naturally fled from his enemies ; for the other gates of the city, and the roads leading to and from them, being more frequented, were more carefully guarded than this gate, which opened only upon a wide and pathless desert. By this route Paul passed to Arabia, where he spent two years preparing himself at the foot of the mountain of the law, for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The persecution of Christians in Damascus, which Paul wished at first to help, and of which he was himself subsequently the victim, has continued from the time of the Apostle almost to our own day. For the same offence for which the governor of Damascus sought to apprehend Paul, the people would to-day seek to kill a Christian, whom they hate with a most rancorous hatred. But we may confidently hope that the massacre of 1860 will be the last of the outrages inflicted upon Christians in this fanatical city. I met with several persons whose families had all perished save themselves in that dreadful carnage, and they could not speak of the

cruelty of the Mahometans without breaking out into rage and thirsting for revenge. Of the awful scenes of that memorable 9th of July, the Christian quarter of Damascus still bears ineffaceable traces. The whole district was set on fire by the fierce fanatics, and thousands were burnt to death or cut down with the sword as they endeavoured to escape. For a whole day and night the pitiless work of slaughter continued, until the thoroughfares were choked with corpses, and the streets ran red with blood. It was a second and far more dreadful massacre of St. Bartholomew. Against the dark background of this atrocious crime which cried to Europe for vengeance, not in vain, gleams out in beautiful brightness one of those deeds of heroism which exalt humanity as much as the massacre degraded it. A Mahometan chief, the illustrious Abd-el-Kader, took the part of the persecuted Christians, and stood at the imminent risk of his own life between them and their merciless foes. By the aid of his Algerian troops he rescued thousands from the bloodthirsty crowd, and gave them shelter and food within the walls of the Castle of Damascus ; the very same massive and ancient building within which the governor, under King Aretas, kept his soldiers for overawing the turbulent city in the days of the Apostle Paul. The brave Abd-el-Kader refused to give up the Christians whom he had succoured ; and when the mob attacked the citadel and threatened himself with death, he rode fearlessly forth on his charger into the midst of the furious crowd, and cried, " Wretches ! is this the way you honour the Prophet ? May his curses be upon you ! You think that you may do as you please with the Christians ; but the day of retribution will come. Not a Christian will I give up. They are my brothers. Stand back, or I will give my soldiers orders to fire upon you." And like whipped curs the multitude slunk away.

Not a man of the vast Moslem throng dared to raise his voice, or lift his arm against the noble champion of the Christians. I think it right to notice this incident in connection with my subject ; for though it was well known at the time, it has since been allowed, in the advent of a new generation, to fall into oblivion. Such a chivalrous deed should never be lost sight of. It should never be forgotten, that when the Christians of Damascus were being massacred by their Mahometan fellow-citizens, there was one noble Mahometan who rose above the prejudices of his religion, and in the spirit of Christ, saved the followers of an alien and hated faith from destruction at the hands of his co-religionists. There is not in all history a more thrilling incident, a grander moral spectacle.

The Apostle Paul mentions that the persecution from which he suffered took place when Aretas King of Arabia was sovereign of Damascus. Now there is a very remarkable association with this king indirectly among the buildings of the Syrian capital that have survived to our own day. The daughter of Aretas we know was married to Herod Antipas ; but, at the instance of Herodias, her husband divorced her, in order that he might be free to marry his brother Philip's wife. On account of this domestic outrage Aretas went to war with his son-in-law, and after a great battle the army of Herod was routed. Herod was banished by the Roman Emperor to Lyons ; and Aretas received the sovereignty of Damascus. We have reason to believe that Aretas heard of the fame of John the Baptist, and how he had resolutely opposed the divorce of his daughter, and the marriage of Herod to his sister-in-law. John was preaching and baptising at the time in the very region where the two armies met in conflict ; and the soldiers, as we read in the sacred narrative, went

to him for religious advice. It does not therefore seem an altogether fanciful, or far-fetched supposition, that the fact of the first Christian church erected in Damascus being dedicated to John the Baptist, may have had some connection with the gratitude of King Aretas to the Jewish recluse for what he had done for his family.

The first Christian church was built out of the great heathen temple of the city—the old House of Rimmon. It was into this pagan shrine that Naaman brought from the Land of Israel, after the wonderful cure of his leprosy there, two mules' burden of earth, that on the holy soil he might kneel and worship the God of Israel, while apparently bowing in the House of Rimmon to his country's gods. And it was afterwards from this same temple of Rimmon that Ahaz, completely reversing the policy of Naaman, took the pattern of its magnificent altar, and introduced it with all its associated idolatries and heathen practices into the temple of Jerusalem, causing a wide-spread apostasy among the covenant people. The Christian church of John the Baptist was transformed after a time into a Mahometan mosque, when Damascus was conquered by the followers of the Prophet; and this Mosque of the Omeiades, as it was called, became the grandest in all the East. But still it retained traces of its Christian origin; for on its great bronze door was engraved the cup of the Holy Supper, and above its lintel was carved, as if in defiance of the crescent that had usurped the place of the cross, the noble inscription in Greek, "Thy dominion, O Christ! is an everlasting dominion; and Thy kingdom ruleth over all." One of the minarets also was called the Minaret of Isa or Jesus, from the expectation of the Moslems that Jesus would descend from heaven, and on this elevated spot would stand to judge the world. Six years ago, to the lasting regret of the whole civilised world,

this glory of Damascus, first the temple of Rimmon, and then the church of John the Baptist, the cathedral church of Christian Syria, and finally the great mosque of the Mahometan faith, was burnt down to the ground in a single day. I stood sadly among the charred ruins ; but to my surprise and awe, I noticed on what remained of the great bronze door the carved communion cup still gleaming out, and over the blackened portal the noble inscription, “Thy dominion, O Christ ! is an everlasting dominion” ; and I could not help regarding them as prophetic omens of the day when Jesus shall reign over the hearts of the people of Damascus, and the city—the oldest in the world—where Paul was obliged to flee from Jewish persecution, and the Christians of our own day were massacred by the Mahometans—shall become the youngest city of the Christian faith.

We might have imagined that Paul’s deliverance from Damascus, in the face of the greatest danger of his life, would have borne some resemblance in point of greatness to the vision that appeared to him on the way to Damascus, and that led to his conversion. We might have expected that God would send His angel, and deliver him by supernatural means, in some such way as the Apostle Peter was delivered from prison. In our short-sighted reasoning, we are apt to think that such a mode of deliverance would be more worthy of the occasion, and would produce a greater impression upon the enemies of Christ. Satan took our Lord to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, and bade Him cast Himself down from that giddy elevation, in the sight of the assembled crowd below, assuring Him that His safe alighting on the ground would do more for the triumph of His cause than years of quiet, unceasing work. But Jesus refused this ostentatious supernatural proof of His Messiahship ; He preferred to work by ordinary means

and in the common ways of life. And so we think what a powerful effect would be produced upon the minds of the hostile Jews, if God sent His horses and chariot of fire, and delivered Paul from the very midst of them. What a triumph it would be for the cause of Christianity! Why did Christ appear in a cloud of glory brighter than the noonday sun to convert the persecutor? And why did He not appear in a similar form, to rescue him from the murderous hands of those who had become his bitter enemies through his conversion? Why did He allow him to be let down stealthily by night, when no one was looking on, in a common basket over the wall, and thus escape in a humble and undignified fashion? When we contrast the greatness of the Apostle with the humbleness of the way in which he was delivered, we stumble at what seems an incongruity in God's providential dealings. We are impressed with the suitableness of the method which God took to convert Saul, the persecutor. We feel that it was a great occasion—the greatest in the history of the Church—the inauguration of an Apostle who was to stand apart from, and in advance of all the others, for the purpose of giving, both to the doctrines and destinies of the Gospel, their final and unalterable mould. Such an occasion we feel was fitly celebrated by the appearance of the Lord Jesus in person, in the midst of the excellent glory; and we think that when such great hopes and expectations were in terrible risk of being extinguished at once by the murder of the Apostle, it would have been equally proper that the Lord should appear in person in some transcendent form to deliver him from his enemies, and to prove the glory of the cause for which he was condemned. And yet Jesus left him to the unaided resources of human ingenuity—allowed him to be delivered through the devotion of his friends and the humblest of instrumentalities.

And looking back upon the history of God's dealings with His servants we find numerous examples of the same method of procedure. They were delivered by the basket instead of by the chariot of fire. Elijah, who could seal the heavens and withhold the rain from falling for three years, was himself supported by the food procured for him by the ravens, and by the scanty remains in a barrel of meal and a few last drops in a cruse of oil, bestowed upon him by a poor widow belonging to the very country whose foul idolatry had caused the curse to come upon his people. Jeremiah was lifted by a rope of skin out of the miry pit in which he had almost perished of cold and hunger; and the old rags and clouts which Ebedmelech, the negro slave, with rare thoughtfulness and tenderness, brought to the prophet to put under his arms, greatly relieved the strain, and helped to facilitate his escape. Gideon owed the signal victory which he obtained over the Midianites, to the pitchers and lamps which his brave three hundred soldiers carried; and the members of this Hebrew Thermopylæ were themselves chosen out of the large army that followed Gideon, by the simple test of the manner in which they drank from the brook that crossed their path. David saved the Israelites from the Philistines, in the victory he achieved over Goliath their champion, not by the sword and the armour of Saul, but by the shepherd's sling and the smooth stones from the brook. Naaman, the Syrian, was cured of his leprosy, not by the grand means which he himself had imagined, but by washing seven times in the muddy Jordan, which he regarded as far inferior to Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus. Mahomet was rescued from his enemies, by a spider weaving its web over the mouth of the cave in which he had hastily concealed himself. And many a distinguished servant of God is

like the lion in the fable, that was set free from the meshes of the net by the tiny teeth of the mouse.

The lesson which we are intended to learn, from the typical incident of Paul's deliverance by the basket, is obviously the lesson of humility. It is for this purpose that the Apostle mentions it so specially. It is not an isolated, irrelevant incident, as it seems to be in the narrative. We must connect it very closely with the succeeding context if we are to understand its full force. Paul had been in danger of being unduly puffed up with pride, because of the sublime visions which he had received; and as a preventing mercy, to destroy this spiritual conceit in the very bud, a thorn in the flesh was providentially sent, some infirmity which made him insignificant in the eyes of his fellow-creatures. He prayed earnestly to have this thorn in the flesh removed, not merely on the ground of personal discomfort, but chiefly because it was a serious hindrance to his work of preaching the Gospel among a people who valued beauty of form and artistic elegance above everything else. But the thorn was allowed to remain to do its humbling work, while the prayer was heard in the bestowal of sustaining grace; and so thoroughly did the severe discipline of Providence humble him, while the strength of God was made perfect in his weakness, that he was enabled at last to confess, "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." And as an illustration of this chastened spirit, he gives the story of one of the most humbling experiences of his life, and the good it did him.

The dream of the young man, in which he saw the strong Midianite tent levelled to the ground by the feeble, flaccid barley cake that was thrown against it, has often come true. Rameses the Great was overthrown by the plague of flies and frogs; Herod the Great was

obliged to succumb to the touch of the worm : and we too are crushed before the moth. The caterpillar destroys our food, and the mildew produces famine in the land ; the microbe causes the fever that carries off a king's son. It is at the blast of the rams' horns that the walls of Jericho fall to the ground. We are constantly at the mercy of the smallest and meanest objects. God punishes us by agencies that we imagine to be infinitely beneath the dignity of our nature : and His blessings and deliverances are after the same fashion. The land from which our salvation has come is the smallest of all lands. Bethlehem, where our Saviour was born, was but little among the thousands of Judah. God hides the great things of His kingdom from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes. He chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty : and by the foolishness of preaching He brings about the subjugation of the world, and the conversion of its kingdoms into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And we keep this glorious treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God.

It is evidently God's design to subdue our pride by the humbleness of the agencies with which He accomplishes His grand designs in nature and grace. He knows how prone we are to leave Him out of account if the instrumentality is in itself sufficiently great and apparently adequate ; and therefore He makes the instrumentality trivial, in order that we may look beyond it to a mightier power. This method of teaching us keeps us in such a humble frame of mind that we are ready to accept help from any quarter. God has to make us willing in the day of His power, in order that we may fall in with His mode of deliverance. The greatest obstacle is usually in ourselves, in our proud heart of unbelief. The miracle of faith has to be wrought in our own hearts first, in

bringing our proud imaginations low, in order that we may be prepared for the miracle that is to remove mountains for us outside. And such a humbling of us will teach us the great lesson, that with God all things are possible—that He has infinite resources for every emergency in the most unexpected ways and unlooked for places, so that in the most trying circumstances we need not despair. And it will also teach us to use the things that are in our own hands, for we can never know what powers of helping us these common familiar things may possess until we put them to the test.

God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways. They are as high as the heavens above us; but they are also as low as the heavens beneath us—for the same sky that is overhead is underneath in our round orb. God is infinitely greater than we are; but He is also infinitely humbler than we are. He who made the universe condescended to wash the disciples' feet. He who created man saved him by dying the death of a malefactor on the Cross. And if we trust in God, we shall have the mind of God—the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. We shall humbly accept His mode of deliverance for us in our dangers and troubles, no matter how much we may seem exalted above the instrumentality. "Thy way not mine, O Lord!" will be our prayer. If we accept salvation by the Cross of Christ, we shall not be degraded by accepting deliverance from trouble by an agency as lowly as that by which Paul made his escape. By our God assisting us, we shall overleap every wall of opposition and danger, and escape from our foes, even though it be by the disciples taking us by night and letting us down over the wall in a basket. We shall come safe to land, trusting in our Great Deliverer, even though like those who were with Paul in the boat, it be on boards and broken pieces of the ship.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MOUNT OF PRECIPITATION.

“And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.”—*Luke* iv. 29.

THE traditional scene of the tumult at Nazareth—when the countrymen of our Lord passed suddenly from admiration to passionate hatred—is pointed out about two miles south-east of the town. The plateau of Nazareth there rises up into a lofty, pyramidal hill, overhanging the broad plain of Esdraelon, and conspicuous on every side. This hill has received the name of the Mount of Precipitation; and its great cliff, rising straight up from the valley, has been pointed out as that from which the Nazarenes would have cast down our Lord in their furious outburst of pride and bigotry. A hollow in the rock is shown to travellers as marking the spot where the cliff had suddenly become soft as wax beneath the feet of our Lord, and opening up, formed a hiding-place around Him, in which He disappeared from His enemies. This tradition dates only from the middle ages, and has no local verisimilitude. It is not likely that Nazareth has ever occupied any other position than its present site; and from that site the Mount of Precipitation is too dis-

tant to make it at all probable that the inhabitants would have dragged our Lord so far in order to put Him to death. A much more suitable place, which answers all the conditions of the sacred narrative, may be found in the abrupt face of the limestone rock, about thirty or forty feet high, overhanging the Maronite Convent at the south-west corner of the town; and this may well be supposed to be the identical precipice on the brow, or higher part of the mountain, on whose slope, lower down, Nazareth is built, from which our Lord's fanatical countrymen attempted to hurl Him down.

The description of the scene is so singularly precise, and the incident itself so extraordinary, that our curiosity is excited regarding it. Are we to look upon this strange mode of attack upon our Lord as a mere impulsive action—the expedient of a moment—seized by a mob blinded by rage and regardless of the way in which it wreaked its vengeance, provided only that it was effective—or can we see in it a deeper significance? One writer has remarked that the Nazarenes endeavoured to inflict upon Jesus the *new* punishment of death by precipitation, which Herod had introduced into Galilee from Rome; but we have no evidence that such a mode of punishment had been introduced by Herod, or any one else, into the Holy Land. The deliberate mode in which the Nazarenes proceeded to carry out their determination would seem to point rather to the supposition that it was no new punishment which they sought to execute, but a time-honoured custom which existed on the spot.

Nazareth is not usually considered an ancient place. It is altogether unknown in the Old Testament, and first comes into prominence in the Gospel narrative as the town in which our Lord passed His childhood and youth. Its situation, hid within its natural barrier of hills, was the cause of its historical obscurity. For we cannot suppose

that a situation so romantic, with a mild climate and a rich soil, had been left uninhabited until shortly before the Evangelists took notice of it. It is much more likely that at a very early period the migratory bands of Hamites, as they came in this direction from their primeval dwellings, settled upon the spot, and their descendants continued there even when the locality was assigned to Zebulon in the tribal division of the country. The two holy places which the local legends have sought to connect with the nativity of our Lord—viz., the Fountain of the Virgin, and the dark grotto cut in the rock, supposed to be the early home of Christ and His mother—in all likelihood point back to the pre-historic worship of caves and wells which existed on the spot. The inhabitants of Nazareth, from their position, were more exposed than the rest of the people of Galilee to contact with the heathen. They preserved the rough, primitive character which gave them an evil reputation even in the neighbouring villages. Our Lord's ministry in Nazareth differed remarkably from His ministry elsewhere. He could do no mighty work there because of the unbelief of the people. This one locality alone stood aloof from the general enthusiasm, and remained so cold and indifferent that even He, whose human experience was daily confirming His divine foreknowledge of human folly and blindness, marvelled at it.

It is in such a place and among such a people that we should expect archaic customs to continue unchanged. And all the circumstances of the case warrant the supposition that the special form which the furious attack made upon our Lord took was one of these ancient customs. There is every likelihood that on the site of Nazareth there was a pre-historic moot-hill, or open-air court of justice, such as abounded in Palestine during the early days of the Jewish settlement. We read that

Deborah gave judgment under a palm-tree on Mount Ephraim to the children of Israel, just as an African chief assembles for judicial business under the shade of a great banyan-tree in an open circular space in his village at the present day. The brow of the hill on which Nazareth was built may have been the place where the first inhabitants, who reared their rude huts on the rock, summoned an open-air assembly of the community, which represented all that primitive man had to fall back upon in his struggle for right and justice with men of his own tribe or village. And the place of execution—the precipice from which criminals judged worthy of death by the consenting voice of the community were thrown down—was conveniently near the place of judgment.

Death by precipitation is one of the oldest modes of capital punishment. It prevailed widely all over the world in primitive times. Traces and traditions of it are found here and there in different countries, and in localities far apart. We can easily understand how this should be, for in ancient times towns and villages were almost exclusively built upon rocks and heights, for the sake of security. The nucleus of a town was usually a large isolated rock, such as the rock of the Parthenon at Athens, the rock of the Palatine at Rome, the rock of the Chateau at Nice, and the rock of Zion at Jerusalem. Precipitation among the Jews was one form of stoning, which was the recognised legal punishment for blasphemy. Indeed, “stoning,” as the Mishna informs us, was regarded as merely a term for breaking the culprit’s neck. It was made imperative that “the house of stoning,” as the place from which the criminal was cast down was called, should be at least “two storeys high”; and it was the duty of the chief witness to precipitate the criminal with his own hand. If he was not killed at once by the fall, the second witness had to cast a stone upon him ;

and if he still survived, the whole people were to join together in putting an end to him with a shower of stones. The precipitation constituted an essential and humane feature in the act of stoning. Both modes we must regard as an exceedingly primitive custom, the most natural method in which a rude people would wreak their vengeance, or inflict deserved punishment.

The Greek word *katakremnisei*—which has been translated in our version, “that they might cast Him down headlong”—occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, and there is no instance recorded in it of this form of punishment having been actually carried out. There is, indeed, an apparently well-authenticated tradition that the Apostle James—surnamed the Just—was dragged by the infuriated priests from some part of the temple, where he was teaching the people the way of salvation, to the verge of the precipice of Mount Moriah, on which the temple stood, and then, lest they should pollute the sacred precincts with blood, they cast him down into the valley beneath. He was buried in the place where he fell, and his tomb among the sepulchres, in the valley of Jehoshaphat, was preserved till the time of Hadrian. By the Septuagint writers, the same word which St. Luke employs in our Lord’s case was used to signify the barbarous method in which the vast number of captives, whom Amaziah, King of Judah, carried off in his reconquest of Edom, were put to death. They were hurled down from the cliffs overhanging their own city of Petra, as we are told in the twenty-fifth chapter of Second Chronicles: “And other ten thousand left alive did the children of Judah carry away captive, and brought them unto the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, that they all were broken in pieces.”

There is a tradition that Micah the prophet, for rebuking the idolatries of Jehoram, was thrown, by command

of the wicked king, from a precipice near his native village of Morasheth, on the western side of the hills of Judah. This tradition is told by Epiphanius, the well-known writer, who was born in a village in the neighbourhood in the beginning of the fourth century, and is, therefore, likely to be authentic. If Morasheth be identical, as most authorities believe, with the well-known Greek town of Eleutheropolis, then, in the face of the limestone rocks, over one of which Micah must have been precipitated, there are several most remarkable caves, connected together by arched doorways and winding passages, forming a subterranean village of the most ancient inhabitants of Palestine—the troglodytes, or cave-men, who, under the name of Horim, inhabited the whole country from Eleutheropolis to Petra. It is possible that there may be a connection between the mode of Micah's execution and the customs of this pre-historic people; just as there may have been in the similar execution of the Edomites, the descendants, some of them, of the same people, by Amaziah, as already described.

The best-known example of precipitation is that from the Tarpeian Rock at Rome. This is a perpendicular cliff of dark red volcanic tufa on the south-west summit of the Capitoline Hill, overlooking the Forum, now surrounded and concealed by lofty houses built against it. From this precipice criminals and persons convicted of political offences were hurled down, in view of the people assembled in the Forum. It was considered "the fittest goal of treason's race," the promontory whence "the traitor's leap cured all ambition." It is now so much changed from what it used to be that Wordsworth says of it:

"Is this, ye gods, the Capitoline Hill,
This pretty steep, in truth, the fearful rock,
Tarpeian, named of Jove, and keeping still
That name, a local phantom formed to mock
The traveller's expectation?"

But still, it would be a fatal fall to a man, in spite of the thirty feet of rubbish that has accumulated at its foot. The primeval face of the rock shows itself here and there, protruding from the ancient stone-work that encases it, hoary with the mosses and lichens of many centuries. We may suppose from the unbroken continuity of local customs that precipitation from this rock was an immemorial practice. The Tarpeian Rock we know indeed was one of the oldest, if not the oldest, part of the city of Rome. Its material points it out as belonging to the most ancient igneous product of the Latin volcanoes. It was the first solid foundation of the Eternal City, laid down when the rest of the site was in a state of chaos, consisting of ashes and mud deposited in the geological lakes of the Campagna—and when even the Palatine, where Romulus first erected his robber camp, was covered with forest, ultimately consumed by the burning ashes and cinders of neighbouring volcanoes, as is proved by the charred branches of trees found at the present day encased in the materials of its earliest buildings. On this hardened rock the primitive inhabitants first settled; here they erected their rude altar to Saturn, the god of agriculture, after whom they called their village; and around it they clustered their huts of wicker-work plastered with clay. In the centre, or highest point, there was a place of assembly, where markets and sports were held, and religious rites celebrated, and where justice was administered at regular intervals. It was called the Capitol, from its being situated on a height, and was precisely similar to the moot-hill, or open-air court, which existed in our own country in primitive times. The tradition of this original use of it still clings to the place as a shadow from the past. The hill has always been appropriated for political purposes. It has continued from the earliest days to be a centre of secular

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as opposed to ecclesiastical authority. The Popes ceded it to the magistracy, whose municipal buildings now cover it, and placed the Church of Ara Cœli—the only one ever built on the Capitoline Hill—under their protection. The place of execution was chosen conveniently near to this moot-hill, or seat of justice; and the criminal when condemned, was speedily executed, by being hurled over the rock, just outside of the eastern rampart, which surrounded the settlement. We can thus easily understand the association of the Tarpeian Rock with the Capitoline Hill. They were as closely correlated as the moot-hill and the Gallow hill in our own country. The primitive method of execution derived a sanctity from its antiquity, and was continued far on into the most civilised times of the Empire, just as the stone-hatchets and the stone-weights of the Neolithic period were used in killing the sacrifices, and weighing the corn in the Forum during the days of the Cæsars.

In the awful persecutions which took place in Madagascar during the reign of the despotic and superstitious Queen Ràvanàvola, the native Christians were dashed in pieces by being thrown over a huge cliff in the vicinity of the capital. Hundreds of victims perished in this way, and they testified to the power of Christian faith as triumphantly as any of the noblest martyrs in more enlightened countries. The Queen brought back this primitive mode of punishment, which used to prevail in the land, as part of the old pagan system which her predecessor had uprooted in favour of the Christian religion. So, too, during the Waldensian persecutions the “bloody Piedmontese,” as Milton calls them, hurled mother and child over the rocks; and every valley was the scene of some dreadful outrage of this nature which aroused the fierce indignation of Protestant Europe.

A very singular form of precipitation once existed in

some countries. As soon as a man felt the approach of old age he indicated to his children that it was time for him to die. A family consultation was held, a day appointed, and the aged father or grandfather was led out to the brow of a precipice that had acquired a special sanctity, and was then cast over with deepest reverence. In Scandinavia, especially, this strange custom prevailed far on into the Christian centuries. It is referred to in the Saga of Göttreck and Rolf. "Here by our home," says the hero, "is Gilling's Rock ; we call it the family cliff, because there we lessen the number of the family when evil fortune comes. There all our fathers went to Odin without any stroke of disease. The old folk have free access to the happy spot. The children push the father and mother from the rock and send them with joy and gladness on their journey to Odin." Traditions regarding the "happy suicides," as they were called, of those who were weary of the feast of life are numerous in Norway and Sweden ; and the situations of several of these "Valhalla Cliffs" are well known in these countries. Usually a lake stretched below called a "Valhalla Mere," or "Odin's Pond," whose sacred Lorelei beckoned to the aged form on the cliff above, and received it when precipitated into its keeping.

Allied to these "happy suicides," was the precipitation of the Assassins, the followers of the "Old Man of the Mountain," from the huge rock on which the fortress of Subeybeh stood, near the town of Cæsarea Philippi. Every one knows the romantic story of this sect, and of their devotion to their chief, which forms one of the most striking episodes in the history of the Crusades. At the command of Hassan, his warriors leapt from the top of the cliff, where earth met heaven midway, assured that this was the speediest way to Paradise. This superstition

acquired a darker colouring from the memories of the old Canaanitish worship which still haunted the ruins of Hazor, the capital of Jabin, which were near at hand.

I have said that precipitation cliffs were in primitive times associated with moot-hills, or open-air courts of justice. This was the case, as we have seen, in Rome, where the Tarpeian Rock was connected with the Capitoline Hill. We have traces of the same association also throughout Greece; for the assembly of Areopagus at Athens was an open-air court of justice that sat on Mars Hill, and the punishment of the *kremnos*, or precipitation, was doubtless often inflicted there, by the malefactor being hurled headlong over the rocks, long before Solon had reformed the Commonwealth and instituted more refined laws for the punishment of crime. Scandinavia, rich in its evidences of primitive institutions, is perhaps richest of all in its examples of moot-hills with their accompanying places of execution. Iceland possesses the far-famed Thingvalla, with its Lögberk, or Hill of Laws, which was the heart of the Icelandic body politic. Here on the highest peak of the rock formal notices of trials were proclaimed with a loud voice; while on the more level portion of it was held the supreme court or parliament of the commonwealth, at which not only laws were made, but criminals were judged. Near at hand, on the precipitous banks of the Oxara, were the rocks over which in the early days of this singular institution, condemned criminals were hurled into the dreadful abyss below. All over Britain there are numerous relics of the same primitive institutions, which can be easily identified by place names, or by local traditions. In Glenlyon, Perthshire, there is a rock called Craig-Dianaidh, which was used in former times as a moot-hill. It has on it a footprint called Cas Iorg Pheallaidh, or the footprint of St. Palladius, who is

supposed to have passed through Glenlyon on his return from his unsuccessful mission to Ireland, whither he was sent at the beginning of the fifth century by Pope Coelestine. The footprint is distinct, and is filled with water except in very dry weather. It is not a natural hollow in the stone, but an artificial sculpture made to receive the right foot of the primitive chief or king who was here inaugurated by such a ceremony. On this moot-hill criminals were executed by being thrown head-long over the precipice like those at the Tarpeian Rock. The rock is no great height, but a fall from it, if skilfully managed, would result in instant death.

But by far the most interesting association of this kind is that which connects our Lord's trial and execution with the ancient institution in question. The place in Jerusalem called "The Pavement" (Lithostroton), in the Hebrew called Gabbatha, where Pilate delivered Jesus to death, was no other than a primitive moot-hill, or open-air court of justice. It was just outside the Prætorium, or Roman Judgment-hall; and Pilate, by bringing Jesus from his own regular court to the primitive court of the Jews, wished to show that he judged the case not by Roman but by Jewish law. The word Gabbatha is a Chaldee word from a primitive root signifying a bare rounded knoll or height. Connected with this moot-hill was the place of execution, which must have been Calvary or Golgotha, near at hand, where the greatest of all historical events took place. Golgotha, or its Latin equivalent, Calvary, which means a "skull," must have been a knoll, or rising ground, which, by its appearance, suggested the idea of the skull, and so received the name. Immediately outside the north gate of the city, marked by the present Damascus gate, which was always one of the most important outlets of Jerusalem, opening on one of the most frequented roads—there is a round rocky knoll,

which, as Sir J. W. Dawson says, "in its form and certain old tombs which simulate sockets, has a remarkable resemblance from some points of view, to a skull partly buried in the ground, a resemblance which has forcibly suggested itself to many observers." It is the only place that commands a view of the whole city and temple, and the surrounding hills. It is near the site of the Prætorium, and, therefore, near the site of the Gabbatha, the primitive moot-hill of Jerusalem, and has also tombs and gardens near it. All these conditions required by the sacred narrative, and fulfilled here and here only, point out this spot as the true scene of our Lord's crucifixion. The southern side of the knoll has been artificially scarped by ancient quarrying, containing, in the face of the cliff, a cave known to Christians as Jeremiah's Grotto. Jewish tradition points to this spot as the ancient place of public execution; and the Jews still call it Beth ha Sekilah, "the Place or House of Stoning." St. Stephen, the first martyr, is traditionally said to have been stoned to death in this place; and a church dedicated to him stood in the twelfth century near at hand. Such a consensus of evidence has forced our most eminent recent authorities to accept this spot as the true Golgotha or Calvary, in opposition to the usual site which tradition has for ages identified with it. And if this be so, surely no spot in the world should be so interesting as this barren rocky hill, which localises feelings which must ever connect themselves with the historical circumstances of the great atonement for human sin. The spot was well known at the time when the portion of the Mishna which refers to the Sanhedrim was written. According to the laws of that executive body, as already mentioned, the criminal condemned to death must have been hurled headlong over the precipice of El

Heidhemîyeh, and, if not killed instantaneously by the fall, must have been stoned to death with the stones which in this old quarry would be unusually numerous.

This would have been the mode in which our Lord would have been executed, had not the power of inflicting capital punishment been taken from the Jewish tribunal a few years before His death. This was, doubtless, the way in which Stephen was stoned to death, either by an illegal assumption of power by the Sanhedrim or by a tumultuous procedure on the part of the people. As it was, our Lord was put to death by command of the Roman Procurator in a Roman manner, which at the same time fulfilled the prophecies concerning the mode of His death, and was the best way of lifting Him up, so that His cross might become a throne and draw all hearts to Him. We thus see that Golgotha and Gabbatha must have stood in the same relation to each other in Jerusalem, which the Tarpeian Rock stood to the Capitoline Hill at Rome.

On one occasion the infuriated Jews seized upon the stones lying in the courts of the unfinished Temple, and were on the point of summarily executing the punishment of the law, by hurling them at Christ because He claimed to be God. But His calm attitude and convincing words arrested their fury. Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, Ye are gods'?" If the judges of the earth were representatives of the Deity in the sacred exercise of human justice, and bore His name under the express sanction of God Himself, surely it could not be called blasphemy when He who was sent to manifest the supreme justice of God in His life and works appropriated the sacred name. They threatened to precipitate Him from the brow of the hill of Nazareth, and they threatened to stone Him in the Temple of Jerusalem, because He fulfilled perfectly the commission

of the Father. And now He who passed through all this sad and humbling experience is on the throne of judgment, the highest and purest realisation of what man has imperfectly attempted in his courts of justice from the primitive moot-hill to the most imposing imperial parliament. And on this Throne of judgment ere sentence is pronounced, equity steps in as the corrective of the law ; the equity of the Crucified One, for our Redeemer is our Judge !

CHAPTER XII.

THE MIDDLE WALL OF PARTITION.

“And hath broken down the middle wall of partition . . . having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances.”—*Ephesians* ii. 14, 15.

IN the interesting Museum of Antiquities at Constantinople, the object that struck me most was a hoary, battered tablet, with a long Greek inscription cut in it in seven lines. It was discovered in Jerusalem about the end of May, 1871, by the French archæologist Clermont-Ganneau, at a considerable depth below the ground, in the foundations of an Arab house, not far from the Mosque of Omar, on what might have been the site of the Temple of Herod. This is one of the very few relics of that magnificent structure which have survived to our day. The inscription is in capital monumental letters, and may be translated thus: “No stranger can enter within the balustrade round the sanctuary and enclosures. Whoever is caught will be responsible to himself for his death.” Josephus gives a graphic description of Herod’s temple, and mentions that the court of the Gentiles was separated from the part that was restricted to the Jews by two parallel walls, about fifteen feet apart. The outer wall was about four and a half feet high. It was an

elaborately carved stone balustrade with thirteen doors in it, each of which had a pillar in front of it, bearing an inscription in Greek and Latin, forbidding any foreigner to enter the enclosure on pain of death. Josephus mentions that the Romans respected this law; and no Gentile ever ventured to intrude beyond this point.

The prohibition in question, however, was long regarded as apocryphal, even although Philo spoke of the inscription, and corroborated the statement of the Jewish historian. But the discovery of Clermont-Ganneau has placed the matter beyond dispute. The tablet which he found was part of one of the columns guarding the inner sanctuary from the approach of unhallowed feet; and the connection between the inscription carved on it and the passage in Josephus is most striking. The expressions and forms are almost identical. There is indeed a curious variation in the Greek word for "balustrade," or partition wall. In the passage in Josephus it is *druphaktos*, whereas in the inscription it is *truphaktos*; but this variation may be accounted for by the fact that Josephus used the correct classical term, while the inscription spelt the word according to the Jewish method of pronouncing it, changing a *d* into a *t*. Josephus twice refers to the inscription, once in his *Wars* and once in his *Antiquities*; and the parallel passages are differently worded, showing that he did not intend to give the exact phraseology of the stone monument but only the sense. And therefore, that the tablet should give the sense of Josephus' words, without his exact expressions, is just what might have been expected in such a discovery. According to Clermont-Ganneau, the tablet is the most ancient, as well as the most interesting, Greek inscription which archæological investigation in Jerusalem has produced. Its bearings are most important. It supplies a standard of comparison, by which to distinguish Herodian

sculpture and palæographic works from those of previous or later date.

There is every likelihood that our Lord must have often looked at this tablet. His eye must have rested upon it on that memorable occasion, when He saw the poor widow casting her mite into one of the trumpet-shaped chests of brass, into which the Jews put their offerings, and which were placed at the doors of the balustrade. When it is said in the sacred narrative that "Jesus spoke these words," in praise of the woman's generosity, "in the treasury as He taught in the Temple," we must understand that He was standing at the entrance to the Court of the Women, near to one of the doors of the balustrade, and therefore near not only to one of the chests for the offerings, but also to the pillar that guarded the doorway with its awful inscription. When the Greeks desired to see Jesus, as He was speaking to the multitude, in the Temple, shortly before the Passover, He would, most probably, be standing on that occasion near this barrier, inscribed with Greek letters, marking out the separation of the Gentile from the Jew. Around Him were the Corinthian columns, the highest achievement of Greek architecture, which Herod constructed in his magnificent pride. They seemed mutely to unite the Temple of the Jews with the Gentile world of the period, just as the pillars Jachin and Boaz in the Temple of Solomon united the Jewish world with the Gentile; confirming the truth of Christ's own words, "and He taught them saying, My house shall be called of all nations, the house of prayer," or, as it is translated in the marginal reference, "an house of prayer for all nations." The Greeks in question were Gentiles by birth, though residing for the time in Galilee; and they were brought through the different stages of proselytism into sympathy with Judaism and the hopes of the Messiah.

Philip saw a difficulty in bringing them to Christ ; for he remembered Christ's own words, that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and probably he had a sectarian narrowness in his own heart. But Andrew had wider sympathies, and would not repel them because they were not Jews ; but interpreting aright the gracious character of his Master, he persuaded Philip, and together they brought them to Jesus.

The thought that the eyes of Jesus may have looked upon the identical venerable tablet which I saw in the Turkish Museum, was most impressive. I could imagine, when I stood beside it, the sad look upon His face, as He contrasted the narrow exclusiveness of the Jewish dispensation with the Catholic freeness of the Gospel which He came to declare, and thought with pity of the other sheep which He had which were not of the Jewish fold, and which He must also bring, that there might be but one flock and one Shepherd. How the bitter bigotry of the Jews must have wrung His loving heart, that yearned to gather all His creatures under the shadow of His wings, when He saw the covenant people perverting God's plan of grace for all mankind into a mere social privilege for the benefit of a particular race ! God had separated the Jews from the rest of mankind, and educated them specially under His own eye, in order that through their education all the families of the earth might be blessed ; but they regarded this isolation and special training as a proof of exclusive fellowship with God. They claimed for themselves a monopoly of the Divine favour, a sole right to the kingdom of heaven ; and they looked down with a lofty contempt upon all other nations, and refused to have any dealings with them. The tablet in the Temple, with its awful inscription, was the characteristic symbol of the whole Pharisaic religion. It had no place in the original Temple. It

was an unauthorised addition to the ordinances of God. Against what it implied, against the spirit which it revealed, Jesus protested with His whole might. He who said to the outcast, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; said to the haughty Pharisees, who were shutting the kingdom of heaven upon the throngs of the wretched and the ignorant at its gates, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

But not with our Lord only, had the tablet in question a momentous association. It sheds a wonderful light upon the episode recorded at the close of the twenty-first chapter of the Acts. After his purification, the Apostle Paul presented himself in the Temple, to offer his vows to the Lord. A rumour got up among certain Jews of Asia, who were present on the occasion, that, as he had been seen in company with Trophimus, a Gentile of Ephesus, he had taken him with him beyond the sacred balustrade into the inner sanctuary, disregarding the prohibition on the tablet above the door. In this way he had polluted the holy place, and brought upon himself the doom of death. "All the city was moved," we are told, "and the people ran together, and they laid hold on Paul, and dragged him out of the temple," and it is significantly added, "forthwith the doors were shut." The Roman Tribune commanding the fort of Antonia, which looked directly into the temple area, saw this riot, and immediately came down with a cohort of soldiers, and rescued Paul from the hands of his enemies. The multitude followed after, crying, "Away with him." They demanded the execution of the culprit according to the terms of their law. The language which Paul's enemies used was singularly like that which was applied to our Lord Himself, when they led Him away to execution on the ground of His blasphemy; and showed that

the Apostle had indeed the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

This incident made a profound impression upon the mind of Paul. His whole theology may be said to be based upon it. To the Apostle of the Gentiles, the tablet with its dreadful inscription, which separated the court of the Gentiles from the sanctuary of the Jews in the Temple, was the symbol of the whole Jewish religion, with its distinctions in the flesh and its exclusive ordinances. He rejoiced in showing that the partition wall between the two courts was broken down, and that the two were made one, in which all had the right of standing; and that the enmity that existed between Jews and Gentiles was abolished—the Jew welcoming the Gentile freely to the enjoyment of his privileges, and the Gentile gladly and gratefully availing himself of them. All distinctions in the flesh, and all exclusive ordinances were put an end to for ever. It was through the death of Christ that this great spiritual revolution took place. Our Lord had been working for this great end, by His teaching and His miracles and parables during His life; by His denunciation of Pharisaic bigotry, by His parable of the good Samaritan, inculcating in the name of an alien, with whom the Jews refused to associate, the lesson of brotherly love, by restoring the daughter of the Syro-Phœnician woman, and healing a Roman centurion's servant, by warning His hearers against narrow selfish judgments of men who did not belong to their communion, and keeping in prominent view the virtues of those who were regarded as outside the pale of the covenant. And He crowned these liberal lessons of His life by the great expansive effect of His death.

Paul was threatened with death on the supposition—which was false—that he brought a stranger and foreigner with him past the prohibited point in the Temple. Jesus

actually suffered the doom of death, in order that He might truly bring all who believed in Him—no matter however ceremonially disqualified according to the law of the Jews—past every barrier into the inner sanctuary of grace. Jesus died that the middle wall of partition might be thrown down for ever. The veil of the Temple was rent from the top to the bottom, when He hung upon the cross; and now through the rent veil of His flesh a new and living way of access to God is provided for all alike. The crucified Redeemer has Himself become the door by which all the sheep—those who once lived in Jewish folds, and those who had wandered into the wilderness and had never been in any fold—may enter in and be saved. And all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, are not only worshippers like the Israelites, but priests like Aaron and his sons, admitted into the holiest place.

Manifestly referring in his Epistle to the Ephesians to the occasion when Trophimus the Ephesian was with him, and he was obliged to leave him in the Court of the Gentiles, while he himself went into the sanctuary to worship God, Paul says, "He [that is Jesus] is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." On the pillar of separation in the Temple was carved the words, "Let no stranger pass beyond this point on pain of death." Paul took up the very word "stranger" thus referred to, and said to the Ephesian converts, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." And in further allusion to the great Temple of Diana at Ephesus, belonging to the city from which these Gentile converts, these strangers and foreigners came, and the Temple of Jerusalem from which Trophimus their fellow-citizen was shut out with violence, Paul says,

triumphantly, "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone ; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord : In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Trophimus was excluded from the Temple of Jerusalem by the middle wall of partition ; but he and his fellow-Christians in Ephesus should become integral parts of a temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, of which the earthly Temple of Jerusalem was the mere passing and perishing symbol. They should have the blessedness of those who overcoming all the barriers that lay in their way of coming to Christ and serving Him, should become pillars in the temple of their God, and should no more go out ; and the name of their God should be written upon them, and the name of the city of their God, which is New Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from their God.

The deeply interesting tablet in the Museum at Constantinople upon which Christ and Paul must have gazed, seemed to me the Rosetta stone, by which the language of the Old Testament dispensation was interpreted by the language of the New. And we to-day are in the position of the Ephesian converts. The middle wall of partition no longer exists for us. The handwriting of ordinances that was against us has been nailed to Christ's cross ; the prohibition on the pillar has been obliterated. We who were far off have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ. We who were strangers and foreigners are made fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God. The Gospel not only proclaims reconciliation to us, but shows the way of reconciliation for us ; so that we need no longer stay in the outer court, but come in where Christ stands, in the holiest of all, and where for His sake we have the right of entrance.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ROCKING STONE.

“And Adonijah slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle by the stone of Zoheleth, which is by En-rogel.”—*1 Kings* i. 9.

“Quicken thou me according to thy word.”—*Psalms* cxix. 25.

It is evident that the place where Adonijah summoned his followers to meet him, and where he offered sacrifice and wished to be proclaimed king in succession to David, was a consecrated spot, connected with rites of primitive worship and royal inauguration. It belonged to the old-world sanctuaries of the land. It was one of the holy places of the Jebusites, from whom David wrested their city and converted it into his capital. The village of Siloam, in the vicinity, still preserves the memories of this sacred site, and its inhabitants are the actual descendants of the old subjects of Araunah the Jebusite; but the stone Zoheleth, which gave it special sanctity and around which all the religious and political associations of the people gathered, has long ago disappeared. There can be little doubt that it was, as its name implies, a “rolling stone,” on which the young men of the neighbourhood tried their strength in attempting to roll it. The Hebrew word *Zohel* signifies a slow movement

from side to side on a fixed point ; and such would be the motion imparted to the boulder of Zoheleth by the efforts of the people. In many remote parts of our own country may be seen huge stones so nicely balanced on a pivot of rock that they can be easily shaken. They are called Logan, or rocking stones. They are mostly found beside cromlechs and Druidical circles—the open-air altars and temples of our remote forefathers—showing clearly that they formed part of the same primitive worship. The worshipper mounted upon them, and by his feet set the stone a-rocking, or, if less force was necessary, he merely stood beside it and touched it with his hand. The movement of the stone was an essential element in the worship ; it, so to speak, quickened the dead inert mass, gave to it a semblance of life and energy—a quality which it did not itself possess—and this superadded quality communicated to the worshipper some magic influence by which his sin was purified and his soul elevated. The motion imparted, raised the stone for the moment from the lifeless mineral kingdom, into sympathy and fellowship with the living world ; and hence the ancient Greeks called such rocking stones “living stones.”

This primitive idea seems to have entered into many forms of ancient worship and superstition ; we see indications of it in the fairy tale of Aladdin. He had to rub his magic ring or lamp, in order to summon the genius who accomplished for him such wonderful things. We see a remarkable example in the prayer wheel of the Thibetan Buddhists, which is set in motion by the hand, and whose efficacy depends upon its revolutions. The Jewish priest was divinely commanded to wave the first sheaf of the new harvest, dedicated to the Lord, in the Tabernacle and Temple, backwards and forwards, in order to give the dead, withered corn the

appearance of life, to make it seem as it looked when it grew in the field, and the breeze rustled among its stalks and waved the drooping ears as if they bowed in homage before some mysterious presence. Indeed, it would appear that all the sacred gifts and sacrifices of the Jews were waved in the same manner, for the word "offering" in the original, means literally that which is moved. There were wave offerings which were moved backwards and forwards before the Lord, and there were heave-offerings which were lifted up and down in consecration to Him. The wave breast and the heave shoulder of the peace-offering had this horizontal and vertical motion imparted to them, and were the special property of the High Priest and his sons. All gifts and sacrifices were waved or heaved before the Lord, to take away their deadness, and to make them living offerings. By the movements thus imparted to them it was significantly shown that sacrifice was not related to death but to life; that what God regarded was not the dead object or the dead creature that was presented to Him, but the living faith and penitence and obedience of the worshipper that were expressed by the gift and sacrifice. Indeed, it would appear from Leviticus viii. 26, that even the priests waved themselves with their hands full of offerings, as a wave offering before the Lord, in token that they were living worshippers. And all this shows how thoroughly the idea of life, as indicated by movement, pervaded the Jewish ritual; how both the hallowed things which the priests handled, and even the priests themselves, had this significant motion imparted to them as an indication that they both formed together what every true sacrifice should be—a living sacrifice.

The strange incident of the angel coming down at a certain season into a pool at Jerusalem and troubling the waters, so that whosoever first after the troubling of the

waters stepped into it was made whole of whatsoever disease he had, belongs to the same system of religious ideas. Without that supernatural stirring of the waters, the pool of Bethesda, whatever natural healing properties it may have possessed, was but a stagnant pond, powerless and disappointing.

Motion artificially imparted to dead or still objects had such significance in religious worship because it has much significance in the natural world. Movement is the indication of life. It is all essential in the economy of Nature. Nature is continually in motion in order to carry on those operations on which the well-being of her creatures depends. The sea is the most restless and changeable of all things, because without this ceaseless agitation of its waves, and the frequent aerifying of its waters by the churning action of storms, every living thing in it would perish. It would become not only a sea of death in itself, but would be the cause of death to the whole frame of Nature. The atmosphere would become stagnant, and minister disease and death, and not health and life, to every living thing that breathes it, were it not continually disturbed by the winds, and occasionally violently agitated by tempests. There is a constant circulation of the waters which form the life-blood of the earth from the ocean to the mountains, and from the mountains back again to the ocean, fertilising all the regions between, and nourishing every living thing along their course. Were this motion to cease the earth would become a burnt-up cinder like the moon. In our own bodies there is a perpetual motion independent altogether of our own control or care, so that our bodies may be ever ready for living operations. The heart beats incessantly night and day, the blood circulates through the veins without intermission; the lungs keep up their rhythmic movement without pause. There is thus a

physical activity within us which never slumbers, and which always shakes our bodies out of their material inertia, keeps them living, and sways them for all the purposes of life. The motive power is always present, and we have only to apply and employ it. So long as these movements continue the body is alive ; when they cease the body is dead.

Life is action : it is based upon motion. We live by the ceaseless activity within ourselves, which we have to utilise in outward movement, which, in its turn, renders more active the vital principle. We feel that we were made for action, and that in action is our life, and well-being, and enjoyment. We cannot long suppress our breath or stand perfectly still ; and in the painful struggle with them implied in such forced immobility, we become conscious of the power of the movements within us which would otherwise escape our attention. It has been said that of all hard work standing still or doing nothing is the hardest ; and the artist's model, the person who sits for his photograph, or the man whose business it is to maintain himself in a fixed posture for a considerable time, breathes freely when released from the intolerable restraint. Thus, then, the ceaseless activity within ourselves prompts us to constant exercise of our organs and powers in order to give them freer play.

All these movements, applied to stones, sheaves of corn, calm pools of water, and praying machines, may be used as analogies in our spiritual concerns. Our souls are naturally as dead as a rocking-stone. But God can raise up even of these stones children to Abraham. God's Spirit can breathe upon them and give them a vital movement which they do not possess in themselves. The living Spirit can impart living powers to dead souls as truly as the germ of life in the plant can impart its own living properties to the dead mineral matter which it

takes up into its own form and growth. The gracious wind of the Spirit can blow upon the valley of dry bones and make a great stir among them, and join them one to the other and frame of them an exceeding great army of living souls. The means of grace to many who enjoy them are like the pool of Bethesda in its ordinary stagnant condition, having healing virtues latent in them, but incapable of imparting them because of their want of animation. But the angel of the Lord can descend into them and make them quick with healing power, so that whosoever makes use of them in faith will realise them to be indeed channels of salvation. Prayer is to many like the Thibetan wheel when motionless—its whole virtue lies in its movement. It is not in the machine, but in the motion imparted to it by the living human arm, and by the earnest living heart that moves the arm. These heathen were groping in this symbolical action by the light of Nature—the only light they possessed—after the true idea of prayer. It is not prayer mechanically and formally offered up, from which the desire and the fervour of the soul are absent, that avails with God and benefits man; but prayer that is stirred up, as it were, by the vital breath of the soul, quickened and inspired by the movement of the Holy Spirit within us. In every case of conversion it needs that the Spirit of God should move upon the dark stagnant waters, and thus begin the new creation of God in the soul.

And the life thus quickened must be maintained and promoted by activity. We must exercise ourselves unto godliness if we are to preserve and increase our spiritual vitality. The spiritual powers we possess should always be in such lively exercise that we may be ready at any moment for whatever detail of the work of the Lord comes to our hand. We should be so animated by the Spirit of Jesus, who went about continually doing good,

that we should not require any special preparation for special work, but should be able to at once apply ourselves to the fulfilment of the duty before us. Our souls and all that is within us should be so stirred up by faith and love, that it would be as painful for us to suppress the activity of our spiritual powers, as it would be to stand perfectly still, or to keep in our breath in our bodily frames. We ourselves, like the Jewish priests, should be so waved before the Lord, have the heavenly impulses of Divine grace imparted to us so stimulated, that we may present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service. The exercises of worship in which we engage, and the gifts and offerings we bring, should be animated, as it were, by our own devout spirit, waved before the Lord by the activity of our love and holy zeal, so that they may no longer be dead works, but living fruits of the Spirit.

The Psalmist's earnest prayer was "Quicken thou me." He felt himself, in regard to Divine things, to be in a very sluggish state. He lived in a peculiarly trying time—a time of political oppression and religious decadence. Because iniquity abounded, the love of many, even of God's people, waxed cold. He himself felt the spiritual apathy which such a condition of things fostered ; the temperature of his soul had sunk down many degrees on account of the chill atmosphere of worldliness and unbelief which he breathed continually. The outward troubles and discomforts to which he was subjected were apt to draw away his attention from the concerns of his soul ; and thinking so much about earthly things he was apt to forget heavenly things. This state of mind is evident from the very form in which his psalm is composed—in the most elaborate system of acrostics ; for such a constrained, artificial mode of composition must have been the product, not only of a mechanical age, but also of a mind that felt itself

straitened and destitute of the soul of poetry, while yet struggling to acquire it, to clothe its religious thoughts in a poetic dress. The Psalmist sorrowed over this lowness of spiritual life into which he had sunk, and longed to be raised out of it into a clearer and fuller realisation of Divine grace. And therefore the intense prayer of his soul was: "Quicken thou me." So earnestly did he desire this that, like our Lord, who prayed in Gethsemane that the cup might pass from Him, three times using the same words, he, throughout the 119th Psalm continually repeats the same petition, "as if his soul in that one word he did outpour." His prayers bore only the one burden, "Quicken Thou me according to Thy word"; "Quicken me in the way"; "Quicken me in Thy righteousness"; "Quicken me after Thy loving-kindness"; "Quicken me according to Thy judgments." He wished to be quickened according to God's word, up to the fulness of God's promise; he wished to be quickened in the understanding and realisation of God's righteousness, that he too might be righteous according to the Divine standard. He wished to be quickened in God's way, whether by loving-kindness, by gentle and tender dealings, or by judgments, by stern and severe providences, trials, losses, bereavements, no matter what might be the method so that the result of quickening might be obtained. Who does not recognise the ring of a true cry out of the depths of a soul in deepest earnest in these repeated prayers for quickening? And the Psalmist followed up his prayer by personal effort; for the very form of the Psalm was adapted to aid his memory of God's dealings, to reiterate his confidence in Divine Providence, and to allow of his lingering in loving meditation upon every attribute of the written law.

The times are as unpropitious to us as they were to the Psalmist. Scientific scepticism has breathed its icy

breath over our faith, and frozen much of its spiritual earnestness ; agnosticism has produced a feeling of indifference in regard to Divine things, on the ground that we can have no true knowledge or experience of them ; a wide-spread materialism has made all heavenly hopes and aspirations mockingly unreal, a mere mirage of the soul ; a prevailing worldliness has entered the church, hardening the heart, and paralysing all spiritual sensibilities, every energy of the soul being absorbed in securing the ease, comfort, and respectability of life. Thousands never enter a church, on the plea that what they hear has nothing to do with their daily life, and is apart from all their interests ; and many even of those who attend the sanctuary, do so only from a deeply-rooted habit. They regard the service simply as an opportunity for a sleep or a quiet meditation upon their worldly affairs ; while the preacher is “droning over their heads upon antiquated themes.” This prevailing coldness and deadness cannot but affect even professing Christians. In spite of themselves they share in the *vis inertia* and indifference as regards spiritual things around them ; their souls cleave to the dust of the earth, and they become formal and conventional. We need, indeed, to be roused from this state of affairs ; we need to pray earnestly to be quickened.

This quickening must come from God ; it is He alone that can inspire and stimulate the life which He has imparted. “Quicken Thou me.” With Him is the fountain of life, and from Him must be derived all our spiritual energy. He must work mightily in us, if our indifference is to be melted into love, and our mistrust and unbelief to be replaced by faith. It is comparatively easy to reclaim those who have been untouched by the powers of grace ; but it is the most difficult of all things to quicken those who have tasted of the good gifts and the

powers of the world to come and who by carelessness or worldliness have allowed their spiritual life to become low and lukewarm. And this difficulty is most strikingly indicated when it is promised to those who overcome their lukewarmness to sit with Christ on His throne. The highest reward is given to the hardest task. Only as Christ overcame His difficulties by the power of the Highest can we overcome the tendency in us to cleave to the dust. We need the power of God to stir us up to greater earnestness and activity. The Brahmin of India at the present day, when he wants fire for the sacred rites of his religion, procures it by rubbing two sticks together in the manner of his pre-historic ancestors. We do not wonder that the vestal virgins of old were appointed to keep burning the fire that was got in this way. For there is something very remarkable about it. Is it not strange that by rubbing the dry withered stick, something of its old life, given to it by the sunlight, comes back? It is proved in this way that even a dead stick is not so dead that it may not be awakened into flame. And so, however seared and withered with the world's work our hearts may be, dry and sapless as a stick, God can quicken us into a heavenly glow, and set us on fire with his love and zeal.

But while God alone can quicken us, there are means appointed through which the quickening power comes to us, which we ourselves can use. The lightning comes from above, but man constructs and applies the rod along which it is conducted to the earth. The command is issued to us, "Stir up the gift of God that is in thee," and the command implies that we ourselves have a work to do in connection with God's quickening. God does not quicken directly by supernatural power, but by the diligent use of the means appointed for the purpose; just as He does not feed us by manna from heaven, but by the sowing and the reaping of the harvest. We cannot expect the

quickenings Spirit of God but in connection with the means which we ourselves use. And the first and most obvious means of quickening is prayer. This was the expedient to which the Psalmist resorted. Earnest, importunate, persevering prayer was his resource, and it should be ours. This is a power which is usually allowed to lie dormant in us. We have usually too little inclination to pray and excuse ourselves from the performance of the duty on this ground, whereas we ought to confess it as a sin before God, and ask him for grace to warm our cold hearts. The spirit of prayer comes to us in the act of prayer and not in the neglect of it. While praying for the Spirit, the spirit within us is stirred.

But we must not rely upon prayer alone. We must make our prayer the breath of action. We must accompany it with attentive reading of God's word. It is significantly said by the Psalmist, "While I was musing the fire burned." It is because we have so little meditation upon Divine things that we have so little religious enthusiasm, that we too often substitute the mere acquiescence of the intellect for the devotion of the heart. If we mused more upon the glorious truths of the Gospel, we should catch a glow of impulse which would make our prayers passionate, our countenances luminous, our words burning, and our path as the shining light, shining more and more. And with our diligent study of God's word, we should seek to combine a regular attendance upon the ordinances of God's house. Church-going in itself is not a specific for spiritual maladies, but as the sanctuary is the place in which God has promised to meet us and commune with us, if we come to it in the proper frame of mind and use its services in a devout and reverential spirit, by the law of association and the force of habit it will become to us a solemn, holy place, in which all worldly imaginations will be subdued and all

heavenly thoughts stimulated, and the very atmosphere we breathe cannot but quicken our spiritual life. And if with this faithful attendance upon the sanctuary we combine the faithful doing of such works of usefulness as lie to our hand, doing all the good we can in the sphere in which God has placed us, we shall assuredly find that our works of faith and labours of love will have a powerful reaction upon ourselves, giving a sharp edge to our souls and making us truly quick, all alive and ready for every good word and work. Thus exercising ourselves unto godliness God will assuredly quicken us, give us more and fuller spiritual life, and enable us to employ that quickened life in greater devotion to God's service, and in greater usefulness to man.

But the dealings of God's providence are needed for this quickening, as well as the dealings of His grace. We naturally wish to be quickened by easy methods, in ways which will involve as little pain and loss and trouble as possible. "Quicken us after Thy loving-kindness," is our petition. We should like to go through the fire of inspiration like the three Hebrew confessors and not be burnt therein; to pass through the waters of purification and neither sink in them nor fear we shall sink. We should like to have the process and the result without the suffering. And this is the way God, too, loves best. He has no pleasure in afflicting us, and if His continuous goodness will have the effect of leading us to repentance, He will be satisfied to employ that beneficent method only. But if, in spite of His clemency and forbearance, we still cleave to the dust, He will not hesitate, from very love to our souls, to quicken us according to His judgments. Our coldness and deadness is a constant prayer to God to visit us with some outward trouble, which will have the effect of inducing us to change our habits, and live no more unto ourselves, but unto Him. Even by

this method, if no other or gentler method can avail, we should seek, like the Psalmist, to be quickened. O God of our salvation, if we are not to be left alone to cleave to the dust of the earth, and to perish in our worldliness, quicken us all according to Thy loving-kindness, if possible! But if this be not possible, because of the hardness and insensibility of our hearts, quicken us according to Thy judgments, rebuke and chasten us, that we may know that the enriching and ennobling of our life will justify and glorify the means, however severe, and that it is better to enter crippled and maimed as regards earthly things into eternal life, than have earthly faculties and enjoyments unimpaired and be cast away.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SHEEP-GATE OF JERUSALEM.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.”—
John x. 7.

ONE of the most interesting things that the visitor can do in Jerusalem is to walk on the outside of the walls round the city. There is a path all the way carried along the edge of the deep ravines over which Jerusalem is built. I traversed that path on a Sunday afternoon, and found indeed sermons in stones. I wanted to see the nature of the walls, so that I might judge of their age, and find the places where the old gates were. Jerusalem was often besieged and taken by the enemy, and its walls in consequence were often thrown down and rebuilt. And therefore the present walls are not those which we read about in the time of the prophets and in the days of our Lord. But still here and there you can trace parts of the old masonry; and you come across some of the ancient gates, now filled up with stones, but still preserving the mouldings of their vaulted arches in the thickness of the wall. All these ancient gates were built on the same plan, so that it is easy to recognise them. I was specially interested in the old gates of the eastern wall. These were the finest, because the east side of

Jerusalem was considered the sacred quarter, for it was on that side that the Temple stood. The grandest of all the gates was that which was called the Golden Gate. Its architecture is more beautiful and elaborate than that of any other gate. It is completely walled up; but you can see its rich mouldings and splendid proportions. The Mahometans say that when it is opened the day of judgment will come. Through this gate the way led from the inner courts of the Temple into the valley of the Kedron and up the slope of the Mount of Olives, which, on account of this connection with the sacred shrine, was considered a part of the Temple and was held as sacred. It was through this gate that the scapegoat was annually led into the wilderness of Judæa, there to perish with the sins of the people confessed on its head, which it carried away. It was through this gate that Jesus passed into Jerusalem on that memorable day when He came down from the Mount of Olives, and the people strewed the path with their garments and with palm branches, and cried "Hosanna"; and the children of the city, as Jesus entered into the courts of the Temple, joined with the multitude in shouting their joyful welcome.

But the gate before which I stood longest, hardly able to tear myself away, so thrilling were the thoughts and memories which it suggested, was one on the same side as the Golden Gate, only a little farther on. This was St. Stephen's Gate. It was of course modern; but it represented the site of the ancient Sheep Gate through which the sheep destined for the sacrifices of the Temple passed. These sheep were reared on the scanty pasturages in the wilderness of Judæa and on the lonely, desolate hills that extended to the east of Jerusalem, down to Jericho and the Dead Sea. And they were brought up from time to time and passed through this

gate on the side of the city nearest the place where they came from. The pool of Bethesda was close by, in the inside of the city; and in the waters of this pool the sheep were washed from the stains of the wilderness, and made pure and white, before being presented on the altar as an offering to God. Jesus was sitting one day on the Mount of Olives, with His disciples, over against this Sheep Gate, and talking with them about the magnificence of the Temple that rose up before their eyes, when He saw a flock of sheep led by a shepherd coming up the Kedron valley from the wilderness of Judæa, and going into the city by this gate. And according to His usual method of speaking of that which was passing before His eyes, He told His hearers the beautiful parable of the Good Shepherd, and said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep."

Jesus does not say, in this profound aphorism, "I am the door of the *sheepfold*." That would have implied that the sheepfold was more important than Himself; for what a door leads to must be more valuable than the door itself, as the end must always be more valuable than the means. The room, with its furniture and inhabitants, must be of more consequence than the door that leads to it. And if Jesus is only the door of the sheepfold, then that fold must be more precious than Jesus Himself. And many regard Jesus only in that light. He is a door to something that they desire more, and prize more, than they do Himself. Some follow Jesus not for His own sake, but for the loaves and fishes that are to be obtained in His service. They believe in Him and love Him, in order that they may escape hell and go to heaven; or they profess His name because of the worldly advantages connected with such a religious profession; that they may be well thought of by their friends and neighbours, or that they may get on in their

business. Now, all that making gain of godliness is just making Jesus the door of the sheepfold—a mere means to something that is considered higher and more important than Himself.

What Jesus says is an entirely different thing. He says, “I am the door of the sheep”; and in this case the door is itself the most important thing; for Jesus is the door that leads to Himself; that leads to knowing Him more and loving Him better, to getting all the blessings of eternal life, all that makes us holy and happy in Him; for it is in Jesus Christ that all fulness dwells, and He is made unto us all that we need. Jesus is the door of the sheep, the door of their life as sheep, the door to God the Father, the owner of the sheep. “By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved.” He is the door, in Himself intrinsically more valuable than all the benefits to be obtained from Him. He not only made the Gospel by His words and deeds, by His life and death; He is the Gospel. All the promises in Him are yea, and in Him amen. He not only procured redemption for us as a messenger from God, He is made unto us redemption. He not only effects our reconciliation with the Father, He is our peace.

The sacrificial sheep were passing in through the Sheep Gate of the city to the Temple at the moment when Jesus was speaking; but these sheep were only types of Him who was the great Sacrifice, the Lamb slain in the counsels and purpose of God from the foundation of the world, and about to be crucified on Calvary. The Temple where they were to be offered was the type of the temple of His body, which was to be destroyed by the Jews, but which He was to raise up again. All ritual of the Jews carried on in that holy place was only the shadow of His atoning work and sacrificial death. He was the Door of all which that Levitical system of

sacrifice implied : through which its highest meaning, its true fulfilment, was to be reached.

Jesus is the absolute Door ; the door that leads to Himself. The beginning and the end of the Gospel, the substance of the Christian religion is in Him. He is the Author and the Finisher of faith, the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. He commences the good work and He perfects it. If you want to know about Christ then you must go not to others, but to Christ Himself to get that knowledge ; for in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge. If you want to love Christ then you must go to Christ Himself to get the power of loving, for He is love. If you wish to believe in Him, it is from Himself, not from the evidences of Christianity, not from any outward signs and wonders, that you will get that power. You obtain all the blessings of grace, all the gifts of the Spirit, all you need for this life and the life everlasting, not apart from Him, not merely through Him, but *in* Him. For this door is not an entrance or a way, but the whole room, the whole sheepfold, the whole of heaven, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

But more than this is implied in the wonderful expression, "I am the door of the sheep." The Sheep Gate in the east wall of Jerusalem was a symbol of the Jewish dispensation. The Holy City was walled round and shut off from all the other races of mankind. It was fenced in with a wall of ceremonial observances to preserve the Covenant people apart. None could enter in except by the gate of proselytism to the Jewish faith. The sheep entering in implied that only those who offered such sacrifices to the Lord in the shrine of His appointment would be accepted by Him. But when Jesus said, "I am the door of the sheep," He indicated a vast enlargement of the fold and of the gate. Through

His atoning sacrifice as the Lamb of God He should take away, not the sins of the Jews only, but also the sins of the whole world. The exclusive privileges of the Jews were to be ended. Jesus Himself would be their door, would be the Shepherd and Saviour of each member of His flock. And the sign of their being His sheep would be, not circumcision or any outward badge of ceremonial observance, but their recognising His voice and following Him. Other sheep, as He Himself tells us, He had, which were not of the Jewish fold, Gentile sheep which had never been in any fold. Jesus would bring them all to Himself. Lifted up upon the cross, He would draw all men to Him. How graphically did the sheep which Jesus saw entering in by the Sheep Gate into the court of the Temple symbolise the condition of the Gentiles who should be saved by the death of the Good Shepherd! Where did these sheep come from? They came from the waste dreary wilderness without. They came from the plains of Jericho, the accursed city, and from the mountains of Moab, which were inhabited by a race tainted from its very origin, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. And to them all the door of the Spiritual Temple would be opened. The righteous, whoever they might be, justified by faith, would enter the gate of the Lord.

The Sheep Gate, by which the sheep entered Jerusalem, from which Jesus drew His beautiful comparison, was, as I have said, situated in the eastern wall of the city. That side was the side of the rising sun. The east is the quarter of the morning. The New Jerusalem which John saw in vision had three gates on the east, three gates on the west, three gates on the north, and three gates on the south. That was a vision of the fulfilment of the words which Jesus spoke, "They shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and

from the south, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God." But there is surely more meaning in the vision than the mere quarter of the earth from which the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem are to come. I believe the gates refer also to the different periods of life at which persons go to heaven. The gates on the east side admit those who enter heaven in the morning of life, when the sun is just rising, and the dew is on the grass, and all is fair and bright, and full of beautiful promise. The gates on the west side admit those who enter heaven with weary step, at the close of a long life, when the sun is setting, and the sad twilight shadows are gathering and deepening, making the path dim and indistinct, so that there is danger of missing the gates altogether. The gates on the cold, dark, wintry north side admit those who have had few advantages in life, who have been poor and friendless, whose circumstances have been unfavourable, and perhaps through much persecution and tribulation entered the kingdom. While the gates on the warm and sunny south side admit those who had prospered in life, to whom everything had been favourable and pleasant, who had no difficulties to overcome, and no trials to endure. Such, I believe, is a deeper meaning implied in the position of the gates of the New Jerusalem.

The gate on the east side is the best gate by which to enter heaven. That is the most sacred side ; it is nearest the Temple. It is the gate on which the sun rises with his brightest rays ; it is the gate of the morning. We recall that lovely passage which describes Christian sleeping in the Palace Beautiful, in a large upper chamber, whose window opened towards the sun-rising, the name of which was Peace, where he slept till break of day, and then he awoke and sang. So the gate of the east is the gate of peace and of praise. Jesus Himself is

specially the door of the young. Those who seek Him late in life *may* find Him and enter in; but those who seek Him early are sure to find Him and to enter in. Religion is easiest acquired in youth. Youth is the best time for it, when the heart is fresh and tender, and there are no evil stains to rub out, and no dark memories to forget. Religion presents its loveliest side to the young. It makes the deepest and most lasting impression upon them. And if we seek Jesus when life is fairest and brightest about us, we show that we give Him what He values most of all—the free and willing heart; we show that we love Him for His own sake, because He is all our desire, and not merely for saving us from hell and from the miserable ashes and punishments of a wasted life. And if we enter by the morning gate Jesus will be to us the door to all the sweetest blessings of life. In Christ we shall enjoy all our natural pleasures more thoroughly. They will come to us as covenant blessings deprived of all their stains, and stings, and drawbacks, and made sweeter by that blessing which maketh truly rich, and with which no sorrow shall be added. When we enter through this door we do not pass into a prison, but into greater liberty and enlargement. We can *go in and out*, for the truth as it is in Jesus will make us free indeed. We shall be free from every hindrance to serve God, free to make the very best use of our life, free to do everything except sin, for that is our greatest enemy, that which inflicts upon us the most harm.

In the expression, “I am the Door of the sheep,” is implied constant use and active service. The door is not for entrance *once* only; for in that case any temporary expedient, any hole in the wall, might have sufficed. Christ is not a sacrifice by whom we may be saved from death, and admitted to a secure place of deliverance, where we may settle down at ease. A door

is made for the very purpose of being always used, always opened and closed, for going in and out by it continually. Christ is our door continually swinging on its hinges as it were, by which we are to go in and out in the service of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. The door shows us the opening path of duty, limits and prescribes our method of living and working for Christ ; shows us that it is through this door, in this manner, that we are to serve the Lord that bought us, in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ—to do all things for His glory and the good of His world. We are to go in by this door to closer communion with our Saviour continually. We are to go out through this door continually, from this communion to impart the result of our privileges and blessings to the world.

The Sheep Gate on the east side of Jerusalem was the gate of *sacrifice*. The sheep entered by that gate in order to be offered up in sacrifice in the Temple. And did not the Good Shepherd Himself, He who gave His life for the sheep, pass through that very gate on that eventful evening, when he was leaving Jerusalem to go to Gethsemane, from whence he was taken and bound by the multitude, and led back to the city like a sheep to the slaughter? Jesus is the door of sacrifice. He came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. Why, the very name of a door that He takes to Himself, indicates His self-denying, self-sacrificing character ; for a door is not for itself but for the uses of mankind, to open and shut, for ministering not to its own but to the necessities of others. And so the great use of Christ's life on earth was to forget Himself and help others ; and His great use in heaven is to help all who seek His aid. Drawn by love we yield ourselves to Him a living sacrifice. We are bound by the cords of love to the altar. We give our

heart to Christ : and having made that first and greatest sacrifice, everything else is included in it, and goes with it ; we surrender our will, our life, our money, our possessions, all that we are and all that we have. Crucified with Christ we live no more unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again. It is through the sacrifice of Christ that we learn and get the power to sacrifice our own self-seeking, which is just the thing that most of all spoils our character, and mars all the happiness of our life. It is through the sacrifice of Christ that we give up our pleasure, our own way ; that we renounce our own pride and self-conceit, and become meek, and gentle, and courteous and obliging. It is love that prompts such living sacrifices ; and it is love that makes them easy and delightful. We do not grudge making them, because they make our own life richer and fuller instead of poorer and emptier. What constitutes the joy of God ? Is it not just giving Himself away for the good of His creatures, with no rebellious self-will making it difficult and painful ? What constituted the joy of our Saviour ? Was it not enduring the cross for us ? It was this that transfigured His face, and His very clothes, when He spoke of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Have we ever sacrificed ourselves ? Have we ever given up our own way and our own advantage for the good of some one we loved ? Did not that sacrifice yield us the purest happiness we ever experienced ; and did it not produce a love and tender confidence between us and that person which nothing else would have inspired ? Those who enter with Christ the door of self-sacrifice shall enter with Him the door of everlasting blessedness. " Father," said Christ, " I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory," and shall we not add " share it too " ?

The old Sheep Gate in the wall of Jerusalem was closed up with stones. That sight awakened deep thoughts in my mind. No more do the sacrificial sheep pass in through it for the services of the Temple ; for the Temple itself exists no longer. No sacrifice or burnt offering is now made within the walls of the old sacerdotal city, for all Levitical institutions have been abolished. It is by the new and living way, through the rent veil of Christ's flesh, through the great atoning sacrifice of the Cross, that every one, Jew and Gentile, must now enter into the Spiritual Temple. The Sheep Gate is closed, never more to be opened as long as Jerusalem stands, for its use is now over. But Jesus is the ever open door, and the gates of heaven are not shut day nor night. He is the refuge of our souls, and the gate of a city of refuge must never on any consideration be shut. At whatever hour of our need we flee to Him for safety, we shall find Him waiting to succour us in our distress. He is a door, not on the east side exclusively, though He prefers for our own sake that we should enter by that side ; not for the young only ; He is a door also on the west, and on the north, and on the south. From whatever quarter, in whatever period of life we seek Him, we shall find Him. Yes, even in extreme old age, when our sun is all but set, though we have stood during all the wasted years outside, He will be the door of our salvation ; and without upbraiding us, He will receive us graciously and love us freely.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HAND OF MIGHT.

“ In the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote ver against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king’s palace : and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.”—*Daniel* v. 5.

WHILE walking one day through the streets of Jerusalem, I saw a number of masons busy rebuilding and transforming an old house. Over the doorway I noticed, in passing, a rude impression of the human hand, which had evidently been made a short time previously in the soft mortar. On inquiry I was told that it is the custom of masons in Jerusalem to impress this sign upon the structure they are building, in order to avert the evil eye and to secure success in their labours. I looked out for other specimens of this curious superstition, in my walks through the sacred city, and found a good many, old as well as recent, some rude and transient, and others elaborately carved. Several were made on the lintel stone above the door, or on the plaster of the wall beside it in a bright red colour, or in a deep blue ; this last kind being considered the most efficacious. On the occasion of a birth or a marriage, such impressions are not unfrequently placed on some conspicuous part of the dwelling outside, in order to bring good luck. The

women of the house generally daub them on with whitewash.

The Jews interpret the five fingers of the hand-print as symbolising the five names of God, which are very potent in averting evil. Dr. Chaplin says that the Jewish wedding-ring in Jerusalem is in the form of a hand. Charms consisting of the different fingers of the hand made of gold, or silver or glass, are worn by Moslem, Jewish and Christian children alike around their necks to protect them from the evil eye. This superstition is not of Jewish, but of Babylonian origin, and from the earliest ages has been widespread over all the world. The symbol of the Hand of Might was carved upon the Roman standard of the Cæsars. An open hand in full relief wrought in bronze and placed as a symbol against evil in the prows of ancient ships has just been fished up from the Lake of Nemi. The sunken ship to which it belonged was attached to the Temple of Diana on the shore close by, and was used in some of the festivities or religious services connected with the worship of the goddess. On the sceptre of the Indian goddess Sceva the Hand of Might is also carved. The sacred Hand of Mahomet often appears in a widespread form in metal above a suspended lamp throughout the East. The surface is covered with engraved Arabic characters, either expressing the titles of Mahomet or a verse from the Koran. The Red Hand is the device in the coat of arms of Ulster, and is seen upon many of the old crosses of Ireland. In the ancient temples of India and Mexico, this blood-red symbol is seen occupying a prominent position on the walls. On the buffalo robes of some tribes of American Indians the Hand of Might used to be embroidered or painted in brilliant vermilion. The visitor to the mosque of St. Sophia in Constantinople, finds this sign depicted over its principal door. While

in the early Christian Church the manifested presence of God the Father was represented by the ancient symbol of a hand issuing from a cloud.

That this superstition came to Jerusalem from the banks of the Euphrates, where the old Turanian charms were practised and amulets universally worn, is proved by the fact noticed by Smith in his Assyrian discoveries, that the only ornament on the interior walls of the Assyrian palaces consisted of rude models of hands placed on the cornices, fist upwards, their design being to preserve the place against evil spirits. And as there was much commercial intercourse in ancient times between Palestine and Assyria, by the way of the deep defiles of Petra, we are prepared for what Professor Palmer and Major Conder tell us, that in the ruins of El Barid, near the "rose-red city half as old as time," they found a cistern whose cornice was decorated with hand-prints, alternately black and red. We can thus trace the superstition along the route which it had taken from east to west.

The prevalence of this kind of ornamentation in Assyria and Babylonia lends a new and weird significance to the tragical incident which happened in Belshazzar's palace on the night before the overthrow of his capital. The king and his courtiers were celebrating the great resurrection and marriage feast of Ishtar and Tammus—the Babylonian Adonis. In all likelihood the cornice of the great hall in which the banquet was spread, was adorned with representations of the Hand of Might as an object of idolatrous worship. And the sevenfold light of the splendid Jewish candlestick, carried away as the spoil of war from the Temple of Jerusalem, standing in the centre of the table, would bring out in vivid light and shade the mystic symbol. Under the protection of the Hand of Might, Belshazzar

feared not the enemy that was thundering at his gate, and felt free to indulge his mad revels with his courtiers. They filled the sacred golden vessels of the temple again and again with the intoxicating wine, and sang songs, we are specially told, "in the praise of their gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood and of stone"; while they mocked and defied the God of Israel, whose consecrated vessels they were polluting with their profane orgies. When the mad revelry was at its height, suddenly under the cornice ornamented with the Hand of Might, on the wall in front of the king, illumined by the full light of the seven-branched golden candlestick, there appeared the shadow of a hand with its fingers writing three words of terrible import, in a language which no one knew. The idol effigy, the superstitious charm on the palace-cornice, was of no avail. It could not ward off the impending fate. The Angel of the Lord cast His vision into the mould of the Hand of Might, in which the pagan revellers put their trust for salvation. Nothing but the hand was visible, while the awful unseen figure was left to be imagined in all its dread suggestiveness in the background. It was in the hand they put their confidence; and that hand wrote the sentence of doom. There is something unspeakably terrible in this sudden transformation of a power that was supposed to be friendly into an enemy—of what was looked to for protection into an avenging fate. The king and his courtiers had changed God's vessels of holiness into vessels of drunkenness, therefore God changed their charms and amulets into instruments of destruction. There is not in all history any drama more tragic than this! The Babylonian soothsayers and diviners were helpless. They had no magic spell to allay the king's fears, no divining art to read the mystic runes. And that portent of disaster which the bodyless Hand had traced on the

palace walls was but too surely fulfilled on the awful morrow.

The lesson which the incident teaches, he who runs may read. How often in the history of human life does the idol become the scourge, and destruction come from that which was looked to for safety. Haman was hanged on his own gallows, and Goliath was beheaded with his own sword. The plotter of mischief is hoist with his own petard, and perishes in the pit he has dug for another. There is what the French expressive call a *force cachée*, a hidden power which interferes in the affairs of men, and causes the wicked to fall by his own naughtiness. The Hand of Might which seemed strong to save is strong to smite, and the avenging fate is masked in the form of the protecting superstition, as the unexpected lightning issues out of the soft woolly cloud that shades from the heat. The Israelites, in their war with the Philistines, took the ark of God into the fight, and used it as a superstitious relic, a mere fetish, and so far from proving a defence to them, it led to a terrible defeat. The ark of God that was thus degraded was itself taken by the enemy, and the people were routed with a great slaughter. There is a Nemesis attending every act of superstition and will-worship which punishes in kind along the line of sin. The Word of God that is regarded as a mere charm killeth by its letter, and deepens the darkness and ignorance of the soul. The cross that is converted into a crucifix, held up before the outward eye, becomes, not a means of salvation, but of spiritual death. The church that is trusted to alone for safety, becomes a dark cloud to hide the Lord Jesus Christ from view, instead of a mirror to reflect His blessed image—not the cradle of religion, but its tomb. The golden calf that is worshipped instead of the living Saviour is ground to powder, and the worshipper is compelled to drink its dust in the very

well-springs of his life. No superstition can save us, however earnestly we believe it. No kingdom of meat and drink, of circumcision or uncircumcision, can overcome the deadly foes of our soul and defend us from the evil that is within and without us. Only the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, can keep or fortify our heart in Christ Jesus; can draw a charmed line around us, within whose sacred enclosure no foe dare intrude. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

The superstition points to the truth. There is a reality, of which the superstition is a dim distorted shadow. There is a true Hand of Might—a Hand that is indeed mighty to save, mightier than the force with which the earth holds the mountains in their seats, and the sun holds the planets in their orbits. It is the red hand that was nailed to the Cross that blots out the handwriting of ordinances that is against us with its own blood. It is the hand that lay cold in death that bursts the bonds of sin and death and sets us free, and enables us to stretch a hand through death to lay hold of the eternal realities. That pierced hand will cover us with its shadow, and be extended over us in benediction continually. It will not only protect us, it will also hold up our goings that we may not slide, and preserve us from the paths in which are wasting and destruction.

In vain did the Babylonian revellers trust in the Hand of Might that was carved on the cornice of the palace wall. For that superstitious image was a mere outside charm that had nothing to do with the state of their hearts or the character of their lives. In their mad revels they were acting in opposition to the law of righteousness, by which the well-being of the universe is upheld. They were violating the principles of justice and

purity, which lie at the very foundation of all the order of the World. They were taking God's name in vain, mocking at His religion, profaning the holy vessels of His sanctuary. And these things were the crowning offences of a life of oppression, and self-indulgence, and utter confusion. And therefore the hand of the Angel of the Lord wrote the sentence of doom. They were destroyed, and their kingdom given to another. The Hand of Might could not save them against their own evil nature which condemned them.

But when Jesus covers us with the shadow of His hand, that shadow sanctifies us as well as saves us. There is no condemnation to us, because we are in Christ Jesus, and walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The home over whose lintel and doorpost is sprinkled, as it were, the blood of the Lamb, will be as safe as the homes of the Israelites when the destroying angel saw upon them the red sign and passed by. It will be blessed like the house of Obed-Edom when the ark rested within it. And all who trust in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ are delivered, not merely from the guilt and power, but also from the love of sin. Sin has no more dominion over them, because the love of it is supplanted by the love of righteousness. Their salvation is not a mechanical salvation wrought by a charm, but the transformation of their nature into the Divine likeness by the Spirit of grace. They are safe and sound—safe because sound.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOLDEN WEDGE OF ACHAN.

“When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them.”—*Joshua* vii. 21.

WHAT was this wedge of gold which Achan secretly abstracted from the sack of Jericho, and appropriated to his own use? If we give the matter a thought at all, we hastily suppose that it must have been a mere lump of gold, valuable for its material only, and that its shape was of no consequence. The wedge could not have been an implement, for gold is too soft a substance to be employed for such a purpose; and its shape and weight would prevent it from being used as a personal ornament. It has been suggested by Dr. A. Götze that it was a coin well known at the time, and in general currency; and the mention of its exact weight, and its association with two hundred shekels of silver, give much plausibility to this suggestion.

In that case its shape is full of significance, and opens up a most interesting vista of antiquarian speculation. The gold was moulded or beaten into the form of a wedge; and, in that respect, it reminds us of the remark-

able discovery made by Dr. Schliemann in his excavations at Hissarlik, the site of ancient Troy. In the second lowest layer of ruins he found a number of pieces of silver of a similar shape to the golden wedge of Jericho, which, in the same way, could not have been implements or personal ornaments, on account of the softness of the metal and the peculiarity of the form, and must therefore be regarded as a kind of money currency.

We can easily understand how the peculiar shape of these primitive coins had originated. Among the native tribes of Australia at the present day the tough green stone peculiar to one district, which is valuable for making axes, is carried often for long distances to another district, and there exchanged for the red ochre that is found in that district, with which to paint their bodies. This was the mode of trading that existed at one time in our own and in other countries. Before the use of metal brought in a higher civilisation, celts, or stone axes, on account of the difficulty of finding the material suitable for making them, and the great amount of labour bestowed in polishing them and giving them a sharp edge, were highly prized. They formed, therefore, a most popular unit of value. For a stone axe could be got, in exchange, a certain quantity of goods that were of use in the simple life of the aborigines.

After a time the stone age passed away, and the bronze period succeeded, when the arts of life made considerable progress. The celts were no longer made of polished stone, but were moulded in bronze, and yet they still preserved the primitive shape down to the minutest details. What had been a necessity in the stone implement reappeared in exact imitation as an ornament in the more accommodating metal; showing how conservative the artists were. And just as the stone axes had formed a popular unit of value for barter, so their bronze

substitutes served the people of the bronze period as a most useful currency to trade with.

After a time the primitive method of barter gave place to purchase by money, which, in the first instance, consisted of ingots or lumps of gold and silver, weighed in scales on the occasion of each transaction. Then by degrees these lumps of precious metal were made of a fixed weight and standard, and marked with a figure or inscription stamped upon them, which was the guarantee that they were of the proper value, and might be taken at once without the trouble of again weighing or testing them. The material gave the reality of value ; the stamp its assurance. Here came in the conservative instincts of humanity ; and as each age copied the characteristics of the previous age in its own more advanced forms, so the shape of the primitive stone or bronze axe heads was copied in gold and silver, and made of a particular weight, and served as a regular currency. At a later period, still another and higher stage in the process of evolution was reached. Instead of the coin of gold or silver being made of the shape of the primitive celt or stone axe, the coin assumed a circular shape, and the figure of the stone or bronze axe was stamped in the middle of it. The money coined at a very early period in the island of Tenedos, off the coast of Troy, had the figure of a double axe impressed upon it, to preserve its connection with the rude beginnings out of which the complex commercial system of this important region arose. Tenedos played a very prominent part in the Trojan legend ; and the double-headed axe represented on its older coinage connected itself with the silver wedges which Schliemann discovered in the ruins of Troy. The obverse of all the silver pieces of Tenedos had on it a combination of the head of Zeus and Hera ; and the reverse was stamped with a two-headed axe,

with an owl on one side, and a bunch of grapes on the other.

The golden wedge looted by Achan must have belonged to the third stage of the evolution of metal currency, when the real bronze axe-head used for barter was displaced by gold and silver coinage, made in the shape of an axe-head, and of a certain certified weight. The weight of Achan's wedge, we are told in the same narrative, was fifty shekels, which must have represented a very large sum of money in those days. That the ingot was Babylonish is indicated by the fact that it was of gold. In Palestine, the uncoined money in use was made of silver; gold being employed for sacred and ornamental purposes, but not as a medium of exchange. Throughout the law we read of silver money only; and the distinction seems to be preserved in the passage which describes Achan's loot, where the native money seems to be the two hundred shekels of silver, and the foreign, the golden wedge.

The presence of the wedge of gold, and of the Babylonish robe in the city of Jericho, along with the two hundred shekels of silver, shows conclusively that there must have been an active trade at this time between the south of Palestine and the ancient city of the Chaldean Empire. Neither of these objects, however, affords any certain clue to the date of the conquest of Jericho by Joshua. For although the rich and costly garment might belong to the foundation of Babylon, which was laid long before the time of Joshua, it might also be equally appropriate to the later period of its greatest luxury and refinement, when, after the fall of Nineveh, it became the capital of the Mesopotamian Empire; and though the wedge-shaped bullion was very archaic in itself, and marked a very early date, it does not follow that it disappeared completely when true

coinage was introduced. The force of habit and familiarity might cause the old form of money to be still retained and circulated in many places. We have a remarkable instance of this in the survival, during a long period of years, of the coarsest and most archaic forms of Athenian coins, even among the most exquisite specimens of Greek art; for the half-civilised nations with whom the Athenians traded were suspicious of these new and beautiful medals, and preferred the older and ruder mintage with which they were familiar, and whose weight and purity they were sure of. And we know how the beautiful Greek coins, which Alexander the Great and his successors introduced into the Eastern provinces which they ruled, became gradually debased, passing by quick gradations to purely Oriental coins, barbarous alike in design and execution. The old Eastern half civilisation was not competent to keep the art to which it had been cultivated by external force, but which was not native to the Oriental soil.

We can draw no sure inference, therefore, from the presence of the golden wedge and the Babylonish garment in the sack of Jericho regarding the date of the destruction of the city. But this, at least, we can say, that the association together of the two objects is not inconsistent in the least degree with the date usually accepted. Indeed, the whole air of the story of Achan is very antique. Not only is the golden wedge a survival and representation of the stone axe, the earliest object of barter or exchange; but the way in which Achan was detected points to one of the most primitive of human customs, the process of "counting out." Lots were drawn to detect the guilty one; and after eliminating by successive drawings, tribes, families, and individuals, the culprit was at last reached. "So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel near by

their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: and he brought near the families of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought near the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: and he brought near his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken."

The wedge of gold which Achan stole and "the golden wedge of Ophir" of which the prophet Isaiah speaks in the 13th chapter of his prophecies and the twelfth verse, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir," must have been identical. The Babylonians in all probability got their golden wedge originally from Ophir, with which they had an extensive trade; and the inhabitants of Jericho got it in turn in course of their traffic with the Babylonians. The golden wedge of Ophir, shaped like the original stone axe, was often used to buy slaves in the Eastern market. It is a curious coincidence that an adze or axe head of hard green stone is, at the present day, the price or equivalent of a stout man who is to be eaten by the cannibals of the Loyalty Islands. For the golden wedge of Ophir a man could get his pick of the slave-market of the day. And there was a certain appropriateness in buying a slave with this peculiar kind of coin, which was shaped after the model of the primitive implements of industry. Isaiah introduces us to a slave market in Babylon. He tells us that the Hebrew captives were sold as slaves; just as the Moorish pirates used to sell in Algiers Christians whom they captured on the shores of the Mediterranean. Daniel was a slave to King Nebuchadnezzar, and so were the three Hebrew captives Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and so was Nehemiah. But Isaiah in his inspired vision foresaw a time when this iniquitous

practice should cease ; when the city itself and its slave market would be destroyed, and all its captive slaves set free. A man should then be considered of more value than the golden wedge of Ophir ; no money could purchase or compel his services. He would be free to give them or withhold them as he pleased. They would be entirely voluntary.

But, apart from slavery, is the converse of the prophet's words not too true, that the golden wedge of Ophir is more precious than a man? Is it not true that in all ages man has been sold, or has sold himself for this golden wedge? Gold has been made an idol, at whose shrine numberless human beings have been sacrificed, or have sacrificed themselves. What an inordinate value have men at all times set upon the acquisition of gold. That first fabled expedition of the Argonauts in search of the golden fleet of Colchis in far-off times has been repeated innumerable times since. All kinds of privations and hardships have been undergone in pursuit of this precious metal. In California and Australia, when the goldfields were discovered, men abandoned their homes and families, and all the settled industries and dear interests of life, in their mad rush to enrich themselves at once by wealth that could be got, as they thought, for the mere gathering. In our own day has there ever been any enthusiasm like that shown in connection with the discovery of gold in the inhospitable wastes of Alaska? Multitudes have perished of cold and hunger, even while they grasped the fortunes which they risked and lost all else to gain. In our own country—in modern society—is it not too true that gold is placed above everything else? There is a passion for wealth, a haste for riches, an exaggerated estimate of the value of money which dominates every other sentiment in the minds of men. Nearly the whole of the energy of the various classes in

our country is absorbed in money-getting. To belong to the prosperous moneyed class most people give their whole soul; to be excluded from it by poverty is to be shut out from society. And how often do men of noble genius debase their God-given powers by flattering the public taste and selling themselves for money, in order to keep up sides with the wealthy in all the show and circumstance of life. They treat their genius as the Jew "sweats" sovereigns by shaking them violently in a bag to get gold dust out of them. Human life has always been held cheap, and perhaps never cheaper than now. The casualties of our modern industries produce day after day a waste of human life which is perfectly appalling, and yet we do not heed it in our haste to be rich. We make offences against property more serious and to be more severely punished than offences against life. And this dreary mammon-worship has its inevitable Nemesis. How many rich men have found out, often when too late, that they have paid far too much for their fortune! The passion for it has atrophied every healthy impulse of mind and body. If you survey the restless weariness, the joyless fervour with which men day after day give themselves up to the task of becoming rich, and when rich to become more rich, you will realise indeed that the golden wedge of Ophir is practically accounted more precious than a man.

Faraday, the great scientific philosopher, refused many lucrative appointments that were offered to him, because he could not afford to give the time, talent, and energy which God had given him for searching out and finding the great inspiring secrets of the universe, in exchange for mere material wealth. The golden wedge of Ophir would make a slave of him, as the very shape of it suggested; but he wanted to be free. And so the state of mind which Faraday showed in regard to scientific

things—which, though higher than money, are yet perishing things after all—God wishes us to have in regard to the things that belong to our peace. God wishes to make in our case a man more precious than fine gold—even a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. He reminds us by our very passion for material good that there is spiritual wealth within our reach. He tells us of the true riches that make an opulent understanding and a wealthy heart, and which, after abundantly supplying all the wants of our earthly life, has a boundless reversion for all eternity. The feeling that prompts us to seek gold and accumulate wealth is right and good in itself; and God wants us not to repress or extinguish it, but rather give it nobler play—to lift it from the perishing things of earth to the satisfying realities of eternity. He does not wish us to abate in one tittle our desire for accumulation, but rather to give a higher range and mightier power to that debased faculty, as, sanctified from its earthliness, it impels us to become rich towards God. Scripture represents covetousness, which we usually think of as one of the meanest passions of our nature, as a misdirected worship—“covetousness, which is idolatry.” The essence of idolatry is the exalting of an inferior object above our own immortal being—bowing down to that which is below our nature; seeking the satisfaction of our spirit in that which is not spiritual like itself, but in that which is material, and therefore foreign and alien. And such idolatry in the sphere of the soul is what the giving of a stone instead of bread would be in the sphere of the body. The one suffers from the derangement and disease produced by its unsuitable food, as the body suffers from the irritation and dyspepsia produced by a mineral diet of dust and ashes.

God says to all who are suffering from this dreadful in-

congruity—"What shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The soul of man is infinitely more valuable than the whole created universe. All that God has without Himself could not satisfy it. It is not with His things, with the works of His hands therefore, but with Himself that He satisfies it. He redeems our souls, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, for these are infinitely beneath its value, but with the precious blood of His own Son. He Himself is the redemptive price of those whom He saves. He gave Himself for them. Nothing else or less could suffice. The golden wedge of Ophir, the symbol of earthly currency, the old axe of toil and barter, which is the same whether it be in stone or bronze or gold, dooms those who are purchased by it from one kind of slavery to another and perhaps a worse kind. The golden wedge of the world's wealth redeems us from poverty and the sordidness of life, and gives us ease and luxury and indulgence; but when trusted in and loved for its own sake it makes us the more miserable slave of our wealth, of our ease and indulgence, the slave of a taskmaster that can make our life wretched even amid the abundance of good things which we possess. But the redemption of a man by the higher currency of heaven, by the gold tried in the fire which maketh truly rich, has no such disabilities. It redeems us out and out, wholly and forever, from every kind of bondage to physical and spiritual evil.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STONES OF CURSING.

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people. And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams. And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram.”—*Numbers* xxii. 41 and xxiii. 1, 2.

THE method of Balaam's divination has an interest of its own, apart from that reflected upon it by its occurrence in the tragic story of one of the most perplexing characters of Scripture. It gives us a curious glimpse into the pagan world, and illustrates a custom that was widespread among ancient nations. When Balak wished to devote the Israelites to destruction by invoking upon them the curse of heaven, previous to going to war with them, it was not enough that the great Gentile prophet should pronounce that curse in his distant home. A prescribed and elaborate ritual had to be gone through. Balaam had to come across the eastern desert to the plains of Moab where the Israelites were encamped. He had to ascend with the king the heights of Mount Nebo, the highest hill in the vicinity—not merely because from that elevated vantage-ground he

could obtain the best view of the goodly array of the tents of the Israelites, as they dotted the extensive plain below, but also because of the superstitious veneration connected with the place. From time immemorial the spot was one of the great sanctuaries of religion. It possessed on its craggy knolls and along its elevated ridges high places dedicated to Baal; and on its loftiest summit, the peak of Pisgah, there was the famous shrine of Baal-Peor.

This was doubtless the worship of the sun as the source of all the life, beauty and power of the world. There was no older, or more universal, or more natural form of idolatry. Mountains were the most suitable places for such worship. They were supposed to be nearer to the divinity. They were lifted above the earth into a holier solitude and a deeper peace. They commanded a wider outlook of heaven and earth. On their summits, the eye could most advantageously behold the rising and setting of the sun, and embrace the widest survey of the kingdom of life which his beneficent beams created and upheld. Mount Nebo in the south was therefore what Hermon was in the north of Palestine, the seat of a primitive sanctuary of nature worship. There, as on a throne high and lifted up, reigned the mighty force whose smile was life—whose frown was death. Balak and Balaam, as their names indicated, were both worshippers of the sun; Balak, a sincere and whole-hearted idolater, for he knew nothing better; Balaam, a man who sought the rewards of divination, while he had the prophet's vision of the things of God, and was rapt out of his baser self at times by their inspiration. Together the two climbed the sacred mountain to invoke the great spiritual force that was supposed to dwell specially there. And few things are more strange and impressive than the repeated attempts which they made

to overpower the voice of conscience, and to wring an answer favourable to their wishes from the local divinity. On successive heights, nearer and nearer to the skies, they built altars of the rough boulders scattered on the hillside, and offered sacrifice upon them. And as the sacrificial smoke ascended, the words of cursing that arose to the prophet's lips were irresistibly changed into words of blessing. From each new point of view a new revelation was given to him of Israel's future. Like a sublime panorama the destiny of the world passed before him, and he knew what a mighty part in its drama was to be played by the people, the outskirts of whose tents he could dimly discern through the haze of distance, with the tall pillar of cloud resting over them as the rallying point and centre of Israel's national life, and the pledge of Divine protection.

In a well-known picture of Moses on Mount Nebo, the artist represents the right hand of the Jewish law-giver resting on a fallen cromlech, as if symbolising in this action the triumph of his religion over an already crumbling idolatry. The introduction of this feature into the picture was a peculiarly happy stroke ; for such cromlechs, consisting of huge blocks of rough stone—gathered from the hillside, and set on end, with a large covering slab placed over them—abound in the neighbourhood of Mount Nebo. On the slopes of the ridge itself, Colonel Conder found, a few years ago, several cromlechs at various levels, the highest considerably below the summit. They occur in groups, and in some places a great number of such groups are found together on one site. On every new occasion it seemed to have been the custom to erect a new altar ; and sacred centres would thus in time be crowded with such structures. To this custom Balak, we are told, conformed, for he erected no less than twenty-one altars on three different sites, a

group of seven on each site. Hosea plainly refers to this multiplication of altars on important occasions when he says, "Their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the field." Among the hill tribes of India it is customary for the relatives of a sick man to vow a large stone in honour of some local deity—to be erected should the sick man recover. Other members of the tribe make similar vows, and thus a group of similar votive stones will appear on a certain spot, and mark it as a religious centre. Some of the table stones of the cromlechs of Mount Nebo have cup-shaped hollows excavated in them, connected together by means of grooves or channels. The presence of these rude sculptures affords a strong confirmation of the view that the monuments in question were ancient places of sacrifice; the hollows and grooves having been made for receiving the libations poured upon the altar, or for collecting the blood of the sacrifices offered upon it. Colonel Conder would not venture to say that he had actually discovered the identical altars which Balaam had erected; but the peculiar archaic appearance of the cromlechs and their local position would seem to indicate that they were at least the kind of altars which the eastern soothsayer must have constructed at the time.

The use of such altars for cursing the Israelites was in strict conformity with ancient superstition. Hamilcar, the Carthaginian general, when his son Hannibal, at the age of nine years, was eager to accompany him in the war against Spain, made him lay his hand on an altar of Baal, that must have been similar to the ones on Mount Nebo, and swear eternal hatred to the Romans. The Druses of Lebanon, who still preserve many remnants of the old Canaanite religion—such as a brass image of a calf, the well-known ancient symbol of the rising sun which they now affect to despise—to this day swear

beside the altars of their chapels on Mount Hermon, and invoke in these sanctuaries curses upon their enemies. Near Triguier in Brittany, a country famous for the mysterious charms of its Celtic and Mediæval monuments, and where the spirit of the old Pagan religion lingers under the alien forms of the Christian faith, there is a place of worship called the "Chapel of Notre Dame de la Haine"—Our Lady of Hatred. It is situated on the top of a bleak eminence amid desolate surroundings; and the present shrine is the representative of one that had stood there from time immemorial. The people have not ceased to believe in the potency of the prayers that are offered there. It is by no means uncommon to see, as the twilight shades are deepening around, muffled human forms stealthily approaching the spot. These kneel before the altar of the Virgin, and pray for the death of the object of their hatred. Three "Aves" devoutly repeated bring about irrevocably that death within a year. There can be little doubt that this chapel occupied the site of a prehistoric altar of cursing, and that the unhallowed rites once practised there long ages ago were continued in the Christian church that afterwards arose in its place, and received the sanction of the new faith; much in the same way as Mahomet tolerated the previous stone-worship of Mecca, and the Roman Catholic religion baptised many of the ancient customs of Pagan Rome.

"Cursing-stones," as they are called, are well known to antiquarians. They are found in several places in our own country; and till very recently they were resorted to by jealous and disappointed persons who wished to imprecate destruction upon the person and property of the neighbour who had injured them. Upon the shore of Loch Macnean, in Ireland, within a short distance of the ancient parish church of Killinagh, there is one of these

“cursing stones,” called St. Bridget’s stone. It is a large roundish boulder of red sandstone, with a flat top in which there are nine cavities artificially scooped out. Each of these hollows contains an oval water-worn stone which nearly fills it. When a man thought that he was wronged, he went to this altar, and taking one of the stones and turning it round, he would wish all manner of evil to his enemy. If he had good cause of complaint, the evil fell upon the wrong-doer ; but if he simply bore spite or malice against an innocent neighbour, the curse causeless would not come, but, on the contrary, the evil returned to his own bosom. The dread of incurring this latter fate deterred many from the use of the altar, and led to its final abandonment. St. Bridget was the queen of heaven, and was adored as the “Mary of the Gael.” Her symbol was a flame, and on her altar blazed a perpetual fire which was maintained for ages in the shrine at Kildare. It is possible that in her worship we may recognise a form of primitive solar adoration. If so, the turning of the oval boulders in the hollows of St. Bridget’s stone would be a part of this Baal or solar worship. The hallowed turn, or the *deseul*, was from east to west, or from left to right, sunwise—the turn which the host still gives to the service of his table, which the housewife gives to her spinning wheel, and the soldier to his brandished weapon. While the sinister turn, or *tuathseul*, which was always made when a curse was invoked, was against the motion of the sun in the heavens, from west to east, or from the right hand to the left. There are individuals still alive who dimly remember the maledictive rotation of the stones on St. Bridget’s altar.

“Cursing-stones” are somewhat numerous in Ireland. There is a celebrated one at the well of St. Fechin, near Cong ; and in the island of Innisismarry, in Connau ght

there is a boulder near the ruins of the ancient Chapel of St. Molaise covered with globular stones somewhat flattened, of different sizes, which are turned in precisely the same way as those on St. Bridget's stone when evil is wished to any one. The custom of "turning stones" in the case of a person considering himself aggrieved, to bring ill-luck upon the offender, still exists in some remote parts of Dartmoor. Not long ago a woman in this locality, who was under notice to quit her farm for some offence, threatened to "turn some stones" against the proprietor. So great was the dread of her occult powers of cursing that it was with difficulty that a man was induced to execute the order for her eviction. A peculiar manner of cursing once prevailed extensively in the county of Fermanagh, Ireland, though it is now rapidly disappearing. It is called the "Fire of Stones." When a tenant was in danger of what he considered wrongful eviction, he proceeded to collect from his farm as many stones as would fill the fire-place of his kitchen. These he piled up on the hearth, like a heap of fuel, and kneeling down he prayed that until that heap of stone should burn, every kind of misfortune might attend his landlord and family to the latest generation. And to prevent all possibility of the malediction being frustrated, the stones were afterwards scattered widely all over the country, so that they could not be gathered together again. We see in this extraordinary method of procedure a manifest survival of the old altar of solar sacrifice, with its sacred fire. As Balak on Mount Nebo built a special altar for each new opportunity of cursing the Israelites, and kindled the flame upon it which consumed the offering, so the Irish farmer built his altar of representative stones from the farm which he was in danger of losing on the household hearth; and as the sacrifice was perpetual, for the stones could never be

consumed, so the curse should never cease. Both instances pointed to their common origin in the pre-historic worship of the sun.

“Cursing-stones” are often associated with holy wells. A very remarkable and deeply venerated well, dedicated to St. Bridget, exists near the altar stone of the saint already described. And this circumstance leads me to notice that there are also “cursing wells,” where, by casting into the water a stone with the name of the person upon whom the curse is to be invoked inscribed upon it, the spirit of the well forthwith causes the victim to pine and die, unless the curse should be willingly removed. Perhaps the most dreaded of such wells is the one in the parish of Llanelian, Denbighshire, called St. Elian’s Well, named after a Welsh pilgrim saint whose churches are renowned for the cure of diseases, and whose fair is still held in August. It is the firm belief of many of the people in the neighbourhood, that a person can put his enemy into this well, that is to say, render him subject to its evil influence. A man who lives near at hand has charge of the well, and after presenting him with a fee, and registering the name of the person to be maligned in a book kept for the purpose, he casts into the well a pin and a pebble carved with the victim’s initials. The person thus cursed soon hears of it; and such is the power of superstitious imagination, that the curse speedily fulfils itself, and death has not unfrequently happened. The curse may be removed by reversing the process, taking out the pebble and pin and appeasing the spirit of the well by a gift. Occasionally the maledictive power of the well has been turned to a good use. Its magic influence has been invoked to curse a disease and so to cure it. The curse as in Balaam’s case has thus turned into a blessing.

The most interesting association connected with my

subject is the incident that took place on Mount Ebal, which is known to this day as the "Mount of the Curses." Moses said to the Israelites, "And it shall come to pass when the Lord thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon Mount Gerizim, and the curse upon Mount Ebal." This remarkable ceremony was performed as soon as an entrance into the Holy Land was effected by Joshua, who proceeded straight from the valley of the Jordan to the sacred spot. Half the tribes stood on the one mount, and half on the other, while the Levites read the law beside the ark pitched in the intervening space between the two hills. In the clear still atmosphere of this locality, where voices are heard at great distances, and every sound is musical, the people on Gerizim responded with their loud "Amen" to the blessings invoked upon those who should keep the law; while the people on Ebal ratified the curses chanted against transgressors.

On Ebal there was a sanctuary from time immemorial. It was one of the oldest, if not actually the oldest, religious site in Palestine. Its western side is still called the "pillar of religion," from a very ancient local tradition that a rude primitive cromlech stood there dedicated in all likelihood to solar worship. It was on the summit of Ebal that Joshua erected his monumental altar, of the twelve stones that had been taken from the bed of the Jordan, during the miraculous passage of the Israelites. And it was in the same place that he constructed, according to Divine commandment, the altar of rude boulders on which a copy of the law of Moses was inscribed—and beside which the maledictions upon the law-breakers were fulminated; if indeed this altar was not identical with the one previously mentioned. Probably Mount Ebal was used as a place of cursing by the aborigines

long before the Israelites took possession of the land ; its primeval cromlech being regarded with the same veneration which the Irish peasants cherished towards St. Bridget's stone. And thus the primitive custom of the place was consecrated by Joshua to a higher service, according to the Divine method of procedure which produces out of the forms of the alien or the false the power of the true. The great height of the mountain, forming a conspicuous object on every side, and its sterile appearance, the bare precipitous cliffs of its dome-shaped summit, and its blue-grey rocky slopes, rising up in remarkable contrast to the rich foliage of the valley beneath, early marked it out as an appropriate shrine of nature-worship, where the severest forms of religion might be cultivated. The study of this whole subject of "stones of cursing" is an elucidation of the fact, that primitive Hebrew life was parallel to primitive life in general ; and we rise from the consideration of the fierce and inordinate forms which early religion often assumed, with deeper gratitude for the clearer and purer light that shines on our Christian path from the revelation on the Mount of Beatitudes. "But I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies ; do good to them which hate you ; bless them which curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VISION OF BETHEL.

“Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.”—*Genesis* xxviii. 16.

AFTER leaving Jerusalem by the Damascus gate on our northern tour, we passed through a very sterile region. Our path lay along the ridge or backbone of Palestine ; and the low hills on either side were mere heaps of grey stones, with here and there a shapeless ruin that indicated the site of some ancient forgotten town. It was a treeless waste that glared in the midday sun ; and only here and there was there a patch of scanty soil of a similar colour with the rocks around, which, in the language of Isaiah, was “digged with the mattock”—and produced a scanty crop of barley. In about three hours we came to our resting-place in a sunny hollow, whose delicious green contrasted strikingly with the hoary barrenness that had previously famished our eyes. This hollow was the bottom of an enormous reservoir, which in ancient times stored up the water so much needed in these dry, parched lands. On one side the wall which surrounded it was entire, but on the other three sides it was broken down and nearly effaced. A copious spring ran into the reservoir, and lost itself in a wide pool, whose surface

was covered with myriads of the white flowers of the common water ranunculus. On the grass-grown brink of this pool we took our lunch. Above us, on the crest of the hill, was the village of Beitin, whose wretched hovels were clustered round a square modern tower built of hewn stone, called the Castle of Beitin, and were made more picturesque by the ruins of an old fortified Greek Church lying about. These ruins, as well as the walls of the gardens and vineyards in the neighbourhood, were largely composed of materials which had belonged to older and more imposing edifices; and fragments of sculptured capitals, cornices, and lintels could be distinguished among them. There were large spaces near at hand covered with lines of foundations, and heaps of hewn stones, showing that at one time the place must have been of great importance.

Tradition has identified this spot with the name of Bethel. The existing village stands on heaps of rubbish, which, if explored, would in all likelihood disclose interesting relics of the period when the place was at the height of its prosperity, and the worship of the golden calves set up there drew to its shrine all the subjects of Jeroboam throughout the northern kingdom of Israel. In the face of the limestone rocks at the upper end of the hollow containing the pool, we could see the openings of ancient tombs, out of which, doubtless, Josiah, during his great reformation, brought the bones of the idolaters and burnt them on the semi-pagan altar, and so desecrated it according to the command of the prophet. We walked up through the bare brown fields; and from the highest point of the plateau we could catch a distant glimpse of the Mount of Olives, and the most prominent buildings of Jerusalem. If Jeroboam's altar, dedicated to the golden calves, was situated on this point, as in all likelihood it was, for such nature-worship was

always performed on a high place, then the rebellious king could see the walls of Solomon's Temple glittering in the sun, when he went up to worship his Egyptian idols; and the two hostile systems of religion were brought into direct antagonism within the same horizon.

As we stood on this spot of matchless memories, we sang together the familiar hymn, "O God of Bethel," to the tune of St. Paul's; the wild inhabitants standing around and listening in wonder. What touching scenes and associations of home that hymn, sung in the place where its words were first uttered, awakened! There were tears in the eyes of some of us, and a yearning throb in the hearts of all. On the upland beyond the village strewn with boulders, and rough, shapeless masses of limestone, grey with lichens and long exposure to the weather, the vision of Jacob must have taken place. It is the stoniest spot in all this stony land, confirming, after the lapse of all these ages, the minute accuracy of the Bible allusion, when the patriarch "took of the stones of this place," and put them for his pillow. We appreciated fully the force of the words in the well-known hymn, "Nearer my God to Thee," about making a Bethel of our "stony griefs." Some of the stones looked as if they had been originally arranged in an orderly fashion, like a Druidical circle; and there it pleased the fancy to locate the wonderful vision. We could echo the words of the patriarch regarding the scene: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." We could not imagine a spot less suitable for a Divine revelation. I had often, indeed, been struck with the unimpressive, matter-of-fact aspect of places in the Holy Land, over which, according to the Scripture story, the heavens had opened and the heart of the unseen realities had been disclosed. But Bethel, the very shrine of the invisible, the very house of God and gate of heaven, seemed to

surpass them all in utter lack of scenic attractiveness. I could understand the spell of natural beauty and grandeur which drew the hearts of heathendom to such shrines as those of Delphi and Eleusis and Cumae. The mystic shadows of oak-woods, the purple splendour of mountain tops, the ceaseless murmur of the deep blue sea, wrought upon the imagination of the pilgrims and deepened the charm of their worship. The sunny idolatry of Pan was appropriately placed among the laughing rills and dancing lights and shadows of the poplars, around the cradle of the Jordan at the foot of the snowy Hermon. I could not imagine it in any other place. But there was nothing at Bethel to arrest the eye or excite the imagination. It had no loveliness of colouring or picturesqueness of features. It was simply a wilderness of grey boulders, where thorny shrubs made a desperate effort to relieve the monotonous desolation. And the wondering question arose in the heart, Why was this place of all others chosen as the scene of such a transcendent revelation? Why should the foot of the ladder that reached to heaven rest, not on snowy mountain top, or purple shore of sea, or far-projecting crag stained with the golden west—spots that seemed akin to heaven because heaven had lent them its fairest hues, but amid the bare rocks of a bleak desert, to which the sky grudged all its colours save the sad and neutral ones?

But I might as well ask, Why should God have chosen the Holy Land itself to be the school for the spiritual education of the world, seeing that nearly every other land far transcends it in point of size or landscape beauty? Nay! I can ascend still higher, and ask why this tiny speck in space which constitutes our world should have been selected among the myriads of orbs, far larger and brighter, which glitter on the face of the midnight sky, to be the theatre of the drama of redemption? It is a principle

with God to pass by that which is great and magnificent in man's eye, and to pour all His glory into some small earthen vessel, that that glory may be seen to be all His own. And there is no illustration of God's method in this respect so impressive as the outward circumstances that attended our Lord's own birth and death. The majestic event of the incarnation was not surrounded with the splendour of heaven but with the meanness of earth. He who appeared to the sleeping patriarch at the top of the ladder at Bethel, irradiated with the highest light, appeared at Bethlehem at the foot of that ladder, in the deepest gloom of poverty, in the form of a little babe dressed in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger in a cave ; and on Calvary He appeared lifted up upon a cross of shame, dying a malefactor's death. There was nothing lovely as man counts loveliness in the scene of Jacob's vision of the union of earth with heaven ; and there was no form nor comeliness, no beauty that we should desire it in the earthly associations of Him who embodied the vision in His life and death, and formed a new and living way by which man might ascend to God.

I saw nothing dreadful about Bethel but its barrenness ; nothing to excite my wonder but its dreariness and loneliness. It had a look as common and uninteresting as a moorland in our own country under a grey wintry sky. The mystic ladder got no confirmation from the bare reality of the scenery around ; and I could hardly believe that the veil between the seen and the unseen had once been thinner there than anywhere else, or that heaven had there come nearer to the earth. But tame and ordinary as is the landscape, I somehow saw there something which the mind alone could behold, which bound my heart with deepest reverence, and needed not the help of mere scenic beauty or picturesqueness to give it interest. My senses could add nothing to the

sacred mystery of the haunted spot. Nay, the very absence of outward attractions made the sentiment of the place all the more impressive, left the imagination more scope for its exercise. In the famous shrines of the pagan oracles at Delphi and Nemi, it is difficult to separate the religious from the natural suggestions of these places; to tell how much of the impression produced in them is owing to the uncommon charms of nature, or to the human mythologies with which they have been associated. The sounds of the rustling wind in such picturesque scenes become easily identified with the voices of the gods, and the gloom of lakes and mountains might easily be imagined to be a sign of their presence. But at Bethel the natural landscape is so bare and exposed that it offers no open door into the supernatural. It was the vision that glorified the spot, and not the spot that suggested the vision. And therefore it is easier to believe that heaven was actually opened at Bethel just because it was nothing but a stony wilderness, and there could have been no verisimilitude, no reason for the invention of a myth in such an unsuitable place. The revelation of Bethel was in strictest harmony with all God's revelations, which derived nothing of their power and awe from the exceptional grandeur of the outward circumstances in which they were given—which "appealed to the soul and heart, to the mind and reason, and not to the mere fancy and poetic imagination of man."

But although there is nothing on the spot to account for its selection as a sacred shrine, it must have touched in some way or other the hearts of the primitive inhabitants of the neighbourhood. For there can be no doubt that the place where Jacob alighted was a sanctuary of nature-worship long before the visit of Abraham. Its original name was Beth-on, the House of the Sun; a name which

connected it with the ancient On or Heliopolis of Egypt, where Joseph's father-in-law ministered as a priest. The people of the old Canaanite time of Luz had raised the rugged stones lying around into a circular temple, so that the sun might cast their shadows on the ground, and the sky with its sunlit clouds might lie in the open heart of the circle. And as an immemorial shrine of sun-worship it had a "*religio loci*" which invested it with an inviolable sanctity, and made it a place of refuge in those lawless times. On many of the heights of Palestine may be seen at the present day little white-washed shrines of worship called *Welys*, commemorating some old local deity or saint. Many of them are merely relics of the primitive sun-worship of the country, which neither the zeal of Hezekiah nor the ardour of Josiah had been able to suppress entirely; and they still retain the privilege of sanctuary. The traveller passing through lonely localities where the people are hostile to strangers, can sleep in one of these *Welys* with perfect safety. No one would dare to touch his person or his property in that sanctuary, guarded as he would be by the shades of the old gods who are supposed still to haunt the spot. Indeed so sacred are such shrines considered by the common people, that an oath taken by them upon the dwelling-place of their local divinity is far more binding than one taken in the name of Allah. It was, doubtless, for the sake of security that Jacob sought shelter in the primitive sanctuary in Bethel. In the unknown lawless country where he was sojourning, no one would molest him in such a holy place. And there God put His Divine revelation into the mould of the patriarch's circumstances. The surroundings of Jacob's resting-place formed the basis and framework of his inspired dream. In that shrine of sun-worship, a broad track of light like the golden rays which we sometimes see welling over the brim of a dark cloud and descending

to the earth on a calm summer afternoon, appeared to the sleeper, connecting heaven and earth ; and in the brightly-illuminated track, the shining counterparts of the rude stones of the druid circle around him, arranged themselves into a lofty staircase, with angels brighter and more ethereal than the steps on which they trod, ascending and descending from the top to the bottom. And instead of the sun at the summit as the source of all this radiant vision of animated light, God, who made the sun, who dwelleth in light which is inaccessible and full of glory—whose shadow the brightest sunshine is, manifested Himself in some visible Divine form—some Shechinah cloud of shaded splendour.

And what a wonderful revelation this was, when we endeavour to grasp its far-reaching meaning ! It took its origin, we see, from a pagan sanctuary ; it employed the stones of that sanctuary as the steps of the visionary leader. There was a reminiscence in the form of the celestial stair-case of the ziggurats or terraced temples which belonged to the native country of Abraham, of which the aged patriarch, for he did not die till Jacob was fifteen years old, may have often spoken to his grandchild when telling him about the wonders of the land beyond the Euphrates. Up the seven flights of terraces of these lofty Chaldean temples, the worshippers climbed to present their offerings to their God, on the altar at the top, as being nearer the home of their deity. There was also in the visionary ladder at Bethel a memory of the Egyptian terraced pyramids which many suppose to have borrowed their form from the older Babylonian temples ; and it also doubtless pointed forward to the terraced structures of Solomon's temple built up the steep slope of Moriah in Jerusalem, the mountain of the Lord's house established upon the top of the mountains. The successive steps of the ladder indicated the stages of human

progress in enlightenment regarding spiritual things ; from the worship of the creature to the worship of the Creator ; from the first dim groping after God in material forms at the foot in the pagan sanctuary where it rested, up to the full clear knowledge of the living and true God in the highest glory. God gave mankind light according to the opening of their eyes, as they were able to bear it, revealed Himself gradually in purer and higher ways by successive economies of grace. And the angels ascending and descending on the visionary ladder, connected all the stages and dispensations together, and showed that they were the gradual unfoldings of one harmonious plan.

To us, looking back upon it from our clear standing point on the completed scheme of grace, the visionary ladder of Jacob is a divine parable of the union in Christ Jesus of heaven and earth, wherein we are made one with God, and with the inhabitants of the heavenly places. But we do not know how much of its meaning the Patriarch could have understood. It was doubtless to him an open revelation of the Eternal ; and a mind so susceptible as his to spiritual influences must have meditated upon it until he had learned at least a few of the great truths it was meant to teach. And the truth implied, which seems to have made the deepest impression upon him, was that which struck him first when he awoke, and all the heavens above him seemed to be still "palpitating" with the heavenly glory. "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not. This is a dreadful place ; this is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven." Even at this early period in sacred history exclusive ideas of religion began to be formed. Religion was supposed to be confined to certain favoured localities. The elect family themselves were guilty of entertaining this narrowing conception of it. Their instinctive tendency was to associate all the unknown world that lay

beyond the sacred spot where they pitched their tents and erected their altar with the powers of darkness. Abraham, when he penetrated to the country of Abimelech, said in his heart, "Surely the fear of the Lord is not in this place"; and he behaved as if God had abandoned this region to the powers of wickedness. And Jacob acted in the same way. While he gladly took advantage of the refuge which the sacredness attached to the pagan sanctuary of Bethel gave to him in an unknown and hostile country, it is evident that he had no feelings of veneration regarding it. He looked upon it as one of the vanities of the heathen having no religious significance to him. Though not in so many words, he too had said in his heart, "Surely the fear of the Lord is not in this place," and he behaved in it as if God had nothing to do with it. He lay down without a thought of God, without any sorrow for his sin, without any prayer; in the hardness of his heart pitying himself as an ill-used and unfortunate man, but not regarding himself as a sinner fleeing from the just punishment which his sin had provoked.

He had left, he thought, the true religion in the tents of his father at Beersheba; for only on the altar of Abraham and Isaac could a true sacrifice be offered and God worshipped with acceptance. There only had God recorded His name and promised to be gracious. We can imagine, therefore, how great must have been his astonishment when the revelation of God came to him in a pagan sanctuary; when, far away from the sacred places of Beersheba, among the lonely desert hills of Ephraim, the visionary ladder connected heaven with this temple of the sun, and claimed it to be a sacred shrine of God. The lesson could not have been taught to him in a more impressive form that God is everywhere present, listening even to the unconscious

cries of the heathen, who are stretching forth their hands to Him, seeking Him in their blindness and by the only means that they know of. And just as Abraham was taught, in the idolatrous country of Abimelech, that the fear of the Lord was in the heart of the heathen king much more than it was at that moment of his deceitful dealing in his own heart ; so Jacob was taught that the idolaters who worshipped in that pagan sanctuary were more children of the light than he himself was in his hard-hearted impenitence. There was the working of a divine spirit within them, drawing them nearer to Himself, which the Patriarch did not comprehend. How different was the mind of Jacob at Bethel from the mind of Paul at Athens, where the apostle recognised in the temples and altars around, raised to the pagan gods, the unconscious longing of their hearts for the living and true God, after whom they were groping through the mists and shadows. Paul saw in these idolaters fellow-worshippers with himself, and he strove to lead them out of the darkness into his own light—"Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you."

Yet another lesson was taught to the sleeping Patriarch by the Divine vision in the heathen sanctuary. As God's worship was not to be confined to any one place ; so neither was His favour to be monopolised by any one family or race. Jacob belonged to the covenant family ; but he was taught impressively by the heavenly vision that the design of God's peculiar favour was not to benefit himself or his race exclusively—but that in him and in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. His life was especially precious to God, to be guarded and provided for in this special way, because the germ of the salvation of mankind lay hid in it. He was to be the commencement of the human generations through whom the Saviour of the world was to

come, whose life was to be the light of men. This promise which God gave to Abraham when He called him out of the land of the Chaldeans, was now renewed to Jacob. From this heathen sanctuary where he lay, Jacob and his seed were to be the means under God of leading the nations outside from their idolatries, up the successive steps of the ladder of light nearer to God and to heaven.

But how slow were the descendants of Jacob to learn this lesson! How continually and offensively were they asserting their vested rights in the favour of heaven, and looking down with contempt upon all the nations around. How coldly did they perform the elder brother's part towards the younger prodigal sons of creation, who had not lost their hold on their Father's love in spite of their idolatries and transgressions! How constantly was Jesus condemning this Pharisaic spirit! He said that the Good Samaritan, the Roman centurion, the Syro-Phœnician woman had shown greater faith than He had seen in all Israel. And it was because the Jews lost sight of their destiny as God's ministers of blessing to the world, and kept all their privileges to themselves, that they were finally rejected by heaven and cast out of their heritage. Jacob was taught the same lesson in the heathen sanctuary at Bethel, which Peter was taught in the household of Cornelius at Cæsarea—"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." And after all these eighteen centuries of Christian teaching our selfish, jealous, exclusive hearts need still to be taught that our privileges and blessings gain, instead of losing, by sharing them with others.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TABERNACLE OF SHILOH.

“He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men.”—*Psalms lxxviii. 60.*

I REMEMBER well the morning, when we left the uplands of Singil, where we had encamped the previous night, and passed down from the squalid village into the green valley beyond, by the rough winding path that forms the central thoroughfare of Palestine. The sky was cloudy, the air was cool and calm, and a delicious quietness, an immemorial peace brooded over everything. And as we came to the lonely spot in a corner of the valley, where we saw the ruins of ancient Shiloh, scattered up the slope of the hill, we felt the appropriateness of the name which the weary warriors of Joshua had given to it, in token of the rest which they obtained in its secluded retreat. But we found here, more than in almost any other part of Palestine, that old-world incidents, which touch with their spell the deepest chords of our being, are often associated with scenes of barren rudeness. It was difficult to realise that this homely spot, which had no element of landscape beauty to distinguish it, and was simply a hidden dimple of verdure amid the bare stony hills of Ephraim,

could have once been the famous shrine of God. The modern name of Seilûn preserves the identity of the old site, and differs but little from the old Bible name. So completely had it disappeared from history that it was only the sagacious reasoning of an American traveller about fifty years ago, following out the minute graphic description given by the Bible of the locality, that enabled him to discover it; and now there is no place in the country whose authenticity is more widely acknowledged.

There is nothing in the aspect of the scenery of Shiloh for the imagination to lay hold of. But the level fields with a deep chestnut-coloured soil are exceedingly fertile, and the fig gardens and olive groves on the terraced hill-sides are more luxuriant than anywhere else. The plain through which we passed, surrounded by low round hills, was green with full-grown barley; and we saw in one part of it, a man ploughing with his dwarf oxen and primitive wooden plough in preparation for another kind of later crop. It was almost impossible to identify the site of any ancient building among the confused heap of hoary stones that were scattered over the face of the hill. On the summit of a mound near at hand, there were the considerable ruins of what was probably a Jewish synagogue of the same date as that of Capernaum. Its modern name is El Arb'ain, the Mosque of the Forty, for there is a small mosque in the corner of it, dedicated to the Companions of Mahomet. On the lintel above the door facing the north, there is carved between two wreaths of flowers, a vessel shaped like a Roman amphora, and supposed to be the pot of Manna, also found in the ruins of the Galilean synagogue. Its walls are built of large square blocks of stone, with massive buttresses piled up against them on three sides, ten feet at the base, and sloping upwards to the top; and

it has been conjectured that this synagogue was built on the spot to commemorate the primitive structure, which, for so many generations, had formed the centre of Jewish worship.

A little way from Seilûn there is a spring at the head of the valley, which pours forth a copious supply of good water into a rock basin whose overflow is now allowed to go to waste, but was employed in ancient times to irrigate the vineyards which are no longer cultivated. The field where they once flourished is still known by the romantic name of the Meadow of the Dance, and perpetuates the memory of the old annual festival held at Shiloh, when the young women of the place came out to dance in the vineyards during the vintage season. This was the Feast of Tabernacles; but the people of the place had engrafted upon it some pagan practices which they had borrowed from the nature-worship of their Canaanite neighbours. It was associated on one occasion with a most picturesque incident, which reminds us of the classic story of the Rape of the Sabines. In the early days of Rome the fellow-citizens of Romulus, in his newly-built robber asylum, provided themselves with wives by seizing the daughters of the neighbouring tribes, whom they invited to witness the splendid games of the Consualia in the valley dividing the Palatine from the Aventine. In a similar manner the remnant of the neighbouring tribe of Benjamin descended from their hills, and carried off the daughters of Shiloh while they were dancing in the vineyards in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles. Another memory of Shiloh is equally romantic. It is connected with the pathetic visit of the wife of Jeroboam to Ahijah, the aged prophet who resided in this ancient sanctuary, and was therefore called the Shilonite, regarding the fate of her youthful son, then seriously ill. The heart of both

parents was bound up in their child, and they were distracted with grief and anxiety. The Queen, herself the sister-in-law of the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt, came in disguise, but notwithstanding this, and the failure of the prophet's eyesight, he recognised her at once, and told the heart-broken mother of the uselessness of her errand. The doom over the house of Jeroboam could not be averted, but her child would mercifully die before any of the threatened calamities should occur, and would go down to his grave in peace, because in him there was found some good thing toward the God of Israel.

But the memories which above all others lend a charm to Shiloh are those connected with Samuel. In the quiet seclusion of this glen grew up ministering before the Lord, in the Tabernacle, the child who most resembled the Holy Child Jesus, when in a northern glen, equally secluded, He grew in wisdom as in stature and in favour with God and man. It was easy to picture in such a quiet featureless scene, where the imagination soared more freely, because of the fewer distractions that surrounded one, the idyllic incidents of Samuel's connection with the place; the pilgrimage of the pious Elkanah from the neighbouring hills of Ephraim to the sacred shrine, the burdened heart and speechless prayer of Hannah his wife who accompanied him; the dedication to the Lord of the child given in answer to that prayer; the annual visit of the happy mother, with her present of a little snow-white coat made with her own hands with loving care; the beautiful unfolding of Samuel's nature in the reverent service of the sanctuary aided by the ripe teaching of Eli. All those innocent incidents that have touched the heart of young and old throughout the world for the last three thousand years, came vividly home to me as I gazed on the hoary ruins, and wondered if by

any possibility Samuel's little fingers had touched any of the stones. My thoughts flew backwards to the Sundays of long ago, when the story of Samuel seemed to my youthful fancy, in the midst of the bare abstract preaching to which I listened, like the alighting of a beautiful butterfly upon the open page of a musty old tome of divinity. And the tender music of the children's hymns in which I used to join when a boy sung itself once more in my mind, with all the sadness of the irretrievable past running through it like a refrain. Tracing up to its source the stream of my religious life, I sought to revive in the place where the lovely story was acted out, the impressions which its name produced upon me when a child. Within the circuit of those homely hills of Shiloh, the heavens, after a long interval of silence, were opened again, and God began anew His communications with men by a voice that came to a little child in the dead hour of night, when the lamp in the tabernacle was burning low. Out of those calm skies came a thunder-clap of judgment that was to sweep away all the religious associations of the place, and reduce it to such a desolation as had never before been known in the land. It was a terrible burden to lay upon one so young. It was like the shadow of the cross upon the childhood of Jesus. By its fearful import it changed the boy at once into a man. The far-sightedness which seemed to belong to this oracular spot brought before me the mournful tragedy of Eli's death. I could almost see the old man, blind and feeble with age, sitting in the judge's chair in the gateway, as he used to do in times of political or religious solemnity, on that fatal day when the breathless tidings came that proved his death-blow; and I could almost hear through the silence of the ages the dying wail of the hapless mother, who, when she knew that the ark of

the Lord was taken by the Philistines, died of a broken heart, using her last breath to call her new-born child Ichabod—the glory is departed. From the hour when the ark was taken out of the tabernacle at Shiloh in obedience to the superstitious demand of the profligate sons of Eli to stimulate the enthusiasm of the Israelite army, as the reliquary of St. Fillan was lifted up to inspire the Scottish soldiers at Bannockburn, it never returned to its primitive shrine. It was carried captive to the land of the Philistines; and the chosen people, defeated by their enemies, seemed also to have been bereft of their God.

Deprived of the Divine protection which the presence of the ark gave to the place, Shiloh experienced misfortune after misfortune. The glory had indeed departed with the ark. Like a body without its soul, the sanctuary fell into decay. The tabernacle or shell that remained when the kernel of the ark had vanished was transferred first to Nob, and then to Gibeon; and finally the city itself, robbed of all its regalia, was overthrown in some terrible catastrophe, the precise nature of which the sacred writers have not told us. In the 78th Psalm there are some obscure hints which tell of the city being ravaged by fire and sword, in all likelihood during some invasion by the Philistines. The prediction came literally true, “Thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation.” The place became like another Jericho. From time to time men have endeavoured to rebuild the village and inhabit the place. Jews and Christians and Mahometans have in turn erected their sacred structures on the site; but some spell of misadventure has prevented their continuance. Even the modern village which occupies the mound behind the ancient ruins is itself in ruins, and adds a squalid feature to the desolation of the scene. As I looked around on the lonely waste I seemed to feel

the shadow of the old curse haunting the balmy spring air. The peace that brooded over everything was the peace of the desert to which man's work had been brought back, the apathetic peace which belongs to places that are dead. The awful words rose to my mind which Jeremiah addressed to the obdurate people of Jerusalem five hundred years after the casting off of Shiloh, "Go ye now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. I will make this house (the temple of Jerusalem) like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." The people of Jerusalem felt secure under the shadow of God's sanctuary. They could not believe that God would proceed to extremities against the place where His own honour dwelt. But little more than a day's journey from their own doors the prophet could point to an object-lesson of judgment, in which God visited one of the earliest and most sacred of the Hebrew sanctuaries with an irretrievable doom.

Shiloh, even though the ark and the tabernacle remained in it for more than three hundred years, was never meant to be a permanent sanctuary of the Lord. It was called "the camp of Shiloh," and was, so to speak, "the last stage of the wilderness journey—the last relic of the nomad life of the chosen people." According to the Mishna, it consisted of an enclosure surrounded by loosely-built walls, with large black goats' hair curtains like those of a Bedouin tent covering the top, and sheltering it from the elements. When this tabernacle or tent, therefore, was removed, the walls crumbled in course of time into the irregular heaps of stones which we see at the present day on the spot. Shiloh was always only "the tabernacle of Joseph," "the tent that God had pitched among men." The spot had been chosen as it

were in haste, because no more suitable one could be found at the time ; for Bethel, the oldest of the sacred places of Palestine, was still in the possession of the Canaanites. Shiloh had the recommendation of being central, and near the principal highway of Palestine. The loneliness of its situation made it also favourable to religious meditation, and it had a fertile soil and abundance of water. But there was the great counterbalancing disadvantage that it had no natural bulwarks, and could not be sufficiently fortified to guard the sacred interests committed to it against the foe. Previous to the conquest of Joshua, it had no ancient memories connected with it to inspire enthusiasm ; and its old Canaanite name of Taanath recalled no stirring recollection. It was simply known as one of the landmarks of the boundary of Ephraim.

Shiloh was not therefore fitted to be the final home of God's sanctuary. The part which it played in the history of Israel, though very important, was only subsidiary. Its historical significance resembled its geographical position. It was near the central thoroughfare of history—but not actually on it. It finally yielded up its claims to Jerusalem, the capital of the land. There the staves by which the vessels of the tabernacle had been carried from place to place in the wilderness were deposited in the Temple of Solomon. But it was not merely as a memory of the past that they were placed there, but also as a symbol that the wandering life of the chosen people was not yet ended. Jerusalem was a tent, as Shiloh had been, in the history of the pilgrim nation. The solid Temple of Solomon itself was spoken of as "the tent of the Lord of Hosts," as "the place where David had pitched his tent." To the very last the Israelites preserved the feeling and the traditions of their early nomad life. The Feast of Tabernacles was

observed every year to remind them in their cities of those traditions. "To your tents, O Israel," was the war-cry of the tribes, long after their settlement in the land; and the prophets were continually recalling the simplicity and purity of the tent-life, in contrast with the luxury and corruption of the cities. It has been often remarked that no architect or sculptor of Jewish blood was ever known; and that no monumental ruins of ancient Jewish edifices, similar to the mighty ruins of Greece and Rome, of Nineveh and Egypt, are to be found in the Holy Land. The chosen people were set apart to be pilgrims and strangers on the earth, to be an example to all other nations of a race who lived by faith, had familiarity with a present Deity, and confidence in things unseen and eternal, and who desired a better country, even an heavenly. And thus "the camp of Shiloh" was a symbol of the earthly pilgrimage of the people, and was early taken down in token that they had here on earth no continuing city, but sought one to come. How deeply did one feel on the spot—among the nameless ruins, the transitory character of all earthly things; and how vain would be our hopes were they fixed only upon the things of time and sense!

Besides its insignificance and defencelessness, one can see another reason why Shiloh could not in the nature of things be the permanent abode of God's sanctuary. Notwithstanding the desolation that has befallen this part of the Holy Land, the traveller can still find many signs of the wonderful fertility of nature. The connection between the character of a people and the character of the land which they inhabit is a mysterious, but still a real one. And in the case of Ephraim, it is easy to see how the rich cornfields and luxurious vineyards that belonged to this tribe helped to weaken the backbone of their religion and morals. The people became bucolic

like the ox, the symbol of their tribe, which fed upon their fat pastures ; and the rich vineyards that clothed the terraced hillsides yielded their produce for the drunkenness and debauchery of the inhabitants, against which the prophets Isaiah and Hosea sternly lifted up their voices. The religion of nature gained here a firmer hold upon the heart of the chosen people than elsewhere ; and even the worship of the living and true God was mixed up with a kind of pagan pantheism, and made more sensual through the symbolic worship of the Calves of Jeroboam. We can understand in a measure how in such a place the strange profanity and wickedness of the sons of Eli should have sprung up. The fertility of the region made it easy to present lavish gifts to the shrine of religion in the midst of it ; and this profuseness made the priests who ministered at the shrine covetous and sensual. The combination of heathen practices with the Jewish rites, the sensuous processions and dances in the vineyards at the Feast of Tabernacles—all favoured the lusts of the flesh ; and Hophni and Phinehas became the willing slaves of them. Ephraim perished owing to the easy conditions of life which its nature-blessings afforded ; and the supremacy in Israel passed to Judah, nurtured on more sterile rocks and arid fields, where continual self-denial and untiring industry were needed to counteract the disadvantages of their inheritance. Religion and morality were kept comparatively purer and simpler on the barren heights of Judah ; and the Temple therefore flourished for a longer period in Jerusalem than the Tabernacle did in Shiloh.

But from first to last the cause of the destruction of Shiloh and the destruction of Jerusalem was not a physical but a spiritual one. It was in all cases the same, the wickedness of the chosen people. We may try to find out philosophic and scientific reasons for the

fall of nations ; we may seek to trace to natural peculiarities of soil and situation the origin of the qualities that cause the decay and extinction of races. We may pretend to see in some spots an unsuitableness for the nurture of a great and enduring people ; we may seek to account for the monstrous wickedness of Sodom by the extraordinary depression of the Jordan valley and the tropical richness of its scenery. But the sacred Oracles brush aside all these secondary influences, and lay the blame where it is due, to the evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Man has the power of controlling circumstances, and some of the noblest characters have risen in the midst of the most unfavourable, as witness Samuel in Shiloh. God treats man as an accountable being ; not as the victim, but as the Lord of the conditions of life. And if he sins and falls, there is a witness in himself that convinces him of his guilt. There is no Pantheistic argument against moral responsibility, and consequently no excuse for sin.

It was not because Shiloh was hurriedly chosen and incapable of defence that the sanctuary departed from it, and the city was destroyed. It was not because the inheritance of Ephraim was so bountiful in natural blessings that its sons on its Delilah lap were shorn of the locks of their strength. Shiloh and the tribe to which it belonged suffered because they sinned. They had exceptional privileges and they were punished with exceptional calamities. The doom of Shiloh was intimately bound up with the fate of the house of Ithamar. And that doom was brought about by the vices of a covetous and sensual priesthood. The wickedness of the sons of Eli—the worst development of the lawlessness of the age—caused the offerings of the Lord to be abhorred by the people ; and the judgment which thus began in the alienation of the people from the worship of the sanctuary, ended in a

violent revolution which swept the place with the besom of destruction. The Philistines were but the instruments in the hands of God in carrying out the doom of His people; and the Ark of the Covenant, to which they looked for safety in battle, went over to the side of their enemies.

No nation was ever so severely dealt with as the Jews, for no nation had been so favoured of God. The jealousy of an offended God burnt hot as coals of juniper against those whom He had so highly benefited and deeply loved, because they had rejected Him and allowed other lords to have dominion over them. They were God's elect people; God made known His word unto Jacob, His statutes and ordinances unto Israel, as He had made them known to no other nation. And called to this high place in the world, was there ever a nation whose abuse of their privileges, whose sin against the light which they enjoyed, was punished with such tremendous judgments? Shiloh and Jerusalem were overthrown, and the sufferings of this elect people as the punishment of their sins form the darkest tragedy of human history. The ears of everyone that heareth of it shall indeed tingle. When looking at the lonely ruins of Shiloh, I felt that the same lesson was being read to me as when a few days afterwards I wandered among the equally desolate ruins of Capernaum. These two most favoured shrines and centres of religion—the place where Samuel ministered and Ahijah prophesied, and the place where our Lord lived and taught and performed His mighty works—were indeed exalted to Heaven by their privileges, but cast down to hell because of their abuse or neglect of them. There is no other reason but that which the Bible gives for the extraordinary desolation of these two remarkable places. It is a desolation that meets us everywhere as the proof of the inevitable connection which God estab-

lished from the very beginning between man's guilt and nature's ruin. Cities in Greece and Italy have perished as Shiloh did, but there was no prophet to point the moral of their downfall. The fate of Shiloh is the key that explains the fate of every other place that has been destroyed. Secular history in the highest sense is sacred history—for it is the unfolding of the providence of a God of truth and righteousness, who has assured us that though hand join in hand, yet the wicked shall not go unpunished. And the Campagna of Rome, the wasted wrecks of ancient civilisation around the shores of the Gulf of Naples, and the lonely mounds of Assyria, as well as the hoary stones of Shiloh, and the haggard deserts of Palestine, all tell the same sad story of privileges neglected or abused, ending inevitably in increase of guilt and deepening of ruin.

Blessed be God that the oracle so long consulted in Shiloh has given place to a more sure word of prophecy. The religious form, which like a bird flying from place to place abandoned its old nest, has built a new one ; but the life itself of religion is transmuted into the ever growing life of the present. Long ages ago, at the commencement of sacred history, the dying Jacob blessed his sons ; and to one he said that the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver between his feet until Shiloh should come, and unto Him should the gathering of the people be. That Messianic prophecy has been fulfilled in the coming of Him who sprang from the tribe of Judah, and who is the true Shiloh, the Prince of Peace, to whom, at His own invitation all the weary and heavy-laden ones of the world flock for the rest which the vain religion of the world cannot give them. He who spoke in olden days at sundry times and in divers manners by the mouth of prophets and godly men, has spoken to us in these last days by the mouth of His own Son. No

more can we hear as Samuel did the Divine voice speaking to us in the watches of the night. We may go to Shiloh, and among its ruins listen to the voice of the past in the oppressive stillness that hangs over all the oracular scene ; and the beating of our own heart will be the only sound we shall hear. But the still small voice of Him, who we know must have passed by Shiloh and read its sad lesson, when He went with His parents to Jerusalem to observe the Jewish passover, speaks to the inner ear and touches the heart, not only in Shiloh but everywhere. Each of us can have the spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Christ Jesus, however, far we may be from the scenes where the light of the truth was first kindled. God's word has a special message for each one of us ; and by the Spirit's power the written oracle can be turned into the living voice of God, speaking to us words of eternal life whereby we may be saved. Blessed are we if like Samuel we are obedient unto the heavenly vision ; but the "long entail" of the woe of Shiloh shall be ours if we despise the day of our merciful visitation. Nay ! much sorer shall be our condemnation ; for we have what Shiloh had not, the light of the gospel as well as of the law, and the help of the Holy Spirit. We have instead of the shadows of good things to come in the ark and the tabernacle, the glorious realities themselves ; and for the types and symbols, the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. How then shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?

CHAPTER XX.

THE SITE OF JERICHO.

“Go view the land, even Jericho.”—*Joshua* ii. 1.

WHEN I stood on the shore of the Dead Sea, I found the scene very different from what I had always supposed it to be. The sand was covered with a gray-green carpet of the most delicate grass, and was made bright with clusters of white composite flowers. Around were luxuriant bushes of the curious tropical vegetation of this region, to be seen nowhere else in Palestine. The heat was intense, and our dragoman had considerably spread over our heads the canopy of one of the larger tents without the sides, which shaded us from the vertical sun. The sky immediately above was cloudless blue; and under its reflection the waters of the Dead Sea stretched away into the lilac distance like a burnished shield, and looked more like a lake of romance than the weird, sullen sea of death which our imaginations had pictured it. But to the westward, dark lurid clouds gathered on the horizon, and partially hid the desolate mountains over which we had passed the previous day from Bethlehem. And every now and then the low growl of distant thunder, coming from that direction, portended an approaching storm.

Scarcely had we mounted our horses, and left the Dead Sea behind, when the tempest burst upon us in all its fury. We had not time to get into our waterproofs before the rain came down like a waterspout, and I was wet through in a moment. There could not be a worse place in which to encounter a storm than that level, lonely plain of the Jordan, stretching on every side for many miles. There was not a bank or a tree or a rock to shelter us; and the violence of the stinging rain and the piercing coldness of the wind were such that our horses had frequently to stop and turn their tails to them. The soil had become a pasty mud, and every few yards little rivulets crossed our track, filled with water, and wide ditches, whose slippery sides required the utmost care to ascend and descend. When we reached the inner banks of the Jordan, having penetrated through extensive thickets of dripping foliage, the Pilgrims' Bathing Place did not impress us with its scenic appearance. It would have needed all the charms of the brightest sunshine and of the bluest of skies to redeem its peculiarly unattractive features. But seen as we saw it—the sky swathed in dense leaden clouds, the ground sodden with rain, the trees tangled with misty moisture, sending up a smoke of vapour, and the sacred river a wide muddy torrent swirling between clayey banks—there was not an element of beauty about it; and we needed to remind ourselves forcibly that this was a place of the most sacred memories, to create any interest in it in our minds. There was a line of poplars and willows fringing the banks, and the young bright green foliage was the only hint of colour in the universal gloom. Surveying the spot disconsolately for a short time, and trying to whip up the emotions which the associations of the place ought spontaneously to have produced in us, we were glad to turn away and ride in the direction of Jericho. The torrential rain

fortunately ceased by this time, but we encountered several heavy showers on the way; and at last, wearied and limp, with all the spirit taken out of us, we reached our camping-ground beside the village of Er-Riha. As our horses stumbled through the stony channel of the brook Cherith, whose waters, swollen by the rain, swept across our path, a sudden burst of sunshine welled over the dark brim of the billowy clouds on the western hills, and illumined the whole wet landscape with a brilliant radiance. We had experienced in this journey to a greater degree than usual the evil effects of the curse which is somehow or other associated with Jericho, but this parting smile of sunshine cheered and warmed our hearts exceedingly.

There were three different Jerichos, on three different sites—the Jericho of Joshua's time, the Jericho of Herod's time, and the comparatively modern Jericho of the Crusaders. They belonged to different races and creeds. The first was heathen, the second Jewish, and the third Christian. Er-Riha, or the modern Jericho, dates from the time of the Crusades; and it owes whatever prosperity it enjoys at present to the Russian pilgrims, who come in crowds every year to bathe in the Jordan. For their accommodation a large hospital has been erected in the place, with a church beside it. There is also a comfortable hotel, kept by a German, where travellers can put up for several days in order to explore the neighbourhood. The village was formerly one of the most squalid in Palestine; but it has been somewhat improved since the building of the hotel and the Russian hospital has brought traffic and money to it. Our camp was pitched on a piece of waste ground outside the village, near a large venerable-looking square tower which goes by the traditional name of the House of Zaccheus, but which is obviously, from its style of architecture, no older than

the period of the Saracens. Beside it is the only date-tree that survives of all the wonderful ancient forests of palm-trees which made Jericho famous. A fire was kindled in the centre of the encampment to dry our wet clothes, and around it the muleteers sat chanting their monotonous, unmusical Arab songs with much clapping of hands. It was very cold, and altogether a different climate from what we had expected. Throughout the night, at intervals, heavy showers of rain rattled on the roofs of our tents, and the wind blew in violent gusts.

Next morning, according to my habit in the Holy Land, I rose in the early dawn and went out. I walked along the plain for about half a mile beyond the camp, till I came to the banks of the Cherith, whose flooded waters nearly filled its channel, and made a delightful gurgling sound as they rushed past to join the Jordan. Here a fringe of oleanders, not yet in bloom, refreshed the eye with their vivid greenness, and reminded me of the promise, whose emblem is taken from this willow-like plant, "They shall grow as among the grass, and as willows by the water-courses." I was struck with the number of thorny plants covering the soil, some of them armed with formidable prickles, which wounded the hand that attempted to gather them; and I was stung, while plucking some beautiful scarlet ranunculuses, by a virulent species of nettle growing among them, whose fruit was a round dark green ball, reminding me, on a miniature scale, of the fruit of the bread-fruit tree of tropical islands, which also belongs to the nettle tribe. The storm had cleared the air and made it crisp and fresh, and the morning sunshine illumined the fleecy clouds and cast their shadows on the earth. The view was magnificent. To the south, a small corner of the Dead Sea glittered under the dark rocks of Engedi; eastward, the great wall of the Moab mountains, with the

round dome of Mount Nebo just showing itself above the plateau, was beginning to assume its characteristic lilac and steel-blue colours. Northward extended the great ghor or valley of the Jordan, bounded on both sides by mountain ranges, with mists curling up their sides in silvery wreaths, like those of a Highland glen ; while out of the sea of vapours rose with fine effect the sharp white cone of Surtubeh, the traditional "exceeding high mountain" from which Satan showed our Lord all the kingdoms of the world, and the picturesque lower peak beside it called 'Osh el-Ghūrâb, or the Raven's Nest. Nameless heaps of ruins here and there excited the imagination, more suggestive on account of their very vagueness ; and all the air was haunted by the memories of the wonderful past. Heaven had come very near to the earth in this storied spot. In the south I could see the dim mountains of Abarim, where angel ministries laid Moses to rest, and God buried him. On the opposite side of the vast plain, concealed by a belt of trees, was the place where that mystic key, the ark of God, rolled back the waters of the Jordan, and opened up for the Israelites a wondrous doorway—a triumphal path—to the Land of Promise. Over the hills of his native Gilead, in the northern distance, rosy-tinted still as if with the remembrance, once glowed the chariot and horses of fire which bore away Elijah to the church of the first-born above. Yonder is the upper ford of Bethabara, where the second Elias took up the mantle which the first had dropped ; and where the Son of God entered upon His public ministry by the rite of baptism, while the heavens were opened, and His divinity was attested by the audible voice of the Father and the visible sign of the Holy Spirit. And near me, any of the fields by the wayside might have been the scene of the opening of the eyes of the blind man—that typical miracle of restoring the

sight of the soul, which is the largest of all the faculties, taking in the whole range of the natural and spiritual worlds.

Er-Riha is supposed to occupy the site of ancient Gilgal, although Conder places the site at Birket Jil-Julieh, about a mile east of this spot, where there is a large ruined tank, and a magnificent old tamarisk tree casts its shadow over several mounds, which, when excavated, contained pottery, hewn stones, and tesserae. It was here or hereabouts that the Israelites set up the first altar to God in the Holy Land, with the stones which they had taken from the bed of the Jordan when they crossed over on dry land. Beside it, they celebrated their first passover, the unleavened bread of which would be composed of the oil corn of the land, for the manna had ceased here. This altar remained the chief sanctuary of Israel till it gave place to Shiloh in the days of Samuel. The houses of modern Er-Riha are mere hovels, somewhat like a gipsy encampment. The people are regarded by the Bedouins as a degenerate race, and by the Christians of Palestine they are known as the "Scomunicati," or outcast people. They are evidently the descendants of the ancient Canaanites of this region, and through long residence in an enervating climate, and constant intermarriage, they have become bodily and mentally degraded. Jericho, on account of its unique position, eleven hundred feet below the level of the sea, and its tropical heat, never could have produced a high type of man. Human nature cannot flourish in such physical conditions, and accordingly we read of no noble deed having been done there save that of Rahab, who was consequently incorporated into the ancestral line of our Lord.

After an early breakfast we left our camping-ground, and passed through the squalid village, by muddy lanes,

between hedges of *nubb* or the *Spina Christi*, of which our Lord's crown of thorns is said to have been made, among which gleamed the bright yellow balls of the fabled apple of Sodom, produced on the long barren stems of the osher tree. In the vicinity were numerous orange gardens laden with the golden fruit, and vineyards whose first tender leaves were giving forth a goodly smell, earlier by a whole month here than on the heights of Judea. All the land around belongs to the Sultan of Turkey as his personal property, and the inhabitants pay rent to him as their superior. In this respect the traditional policy of the place seems to be continued; for in the time of the Romans the land was first an imperial possession, and the revenues were paid directly into the Roman treasury through such tax-gatherers as Zaccheus, and subsequently it was given to Cleopatra, and finally to Herod, who farmed it himself.

About two miles farther west we came to a copious spring called the "Sultan's spring," which tradition identifies with the fountain whose original bitterness Elisha healed by the cruse of salt. The water was clear as crystal; and I could see, adhering to the bottom, a quantity of large fresh-water shells, belonging to the same genus as those which are so abundant on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. An enormous zizyphus, or dôm tree, one of the largest in Palestine, shaded the spring, whose waters gushed forth under its roots into a reservoir, and irrigated a considerable tract of cultivated land below. Around this fountain I saw a large variety of bird-life flitting about—most of it peculiar to the Jordan valley. The lovely little sunbird gleamed with its burnished metallic hues, like a tiny fragment of a rainbow, among the branches of the dôm tree; while the bulbul, or Palestine nightingale, filled the sunny air with its delightful music. Above the spring there are

several large tells or mounds of rubbish, which are supposed to be the grave of ancient Jericho. Sir Charles Warren cut trenches into them, but found nothing of any interest. They seemed to be composed of a yellow clay, with imperfect layers of brick, stone, mortar, and pottery interspersed. The mass of *débris* was evidently formed by the gradual mouldering away of walls and houses, the ruins probably of a succession of mud-built towns on the first Jericho; and proved that the architecture of the Canaanites could not have been of a very substantial or enduring nature. Dr. Bliss, about the time of our visit, found in a hollow scooped out for some purpose or other, near the foot of the biggest mound, called Tell-es-Sultan, specimens of Amorite or pre-Israelitish pottery, precisely identical with what he had discovered on the site of ancient Lachish. He also traced in this place for a short distance a mud-brick wall *in situ*, which sent a thrill through him, as it might be the very wall that fell before the trumpets of Joshua. It is evident that a more systematic exploration is required here, which will doubtless yield the most valuable results. The mounds in question are not far from the foot of the great reddish-yellow precipice of Quarantania, with its numerous caverns, and the spies of Joshua could easily have fled from the city and been speedily hidden in these fastnesses. This fact, and the proximity of the copious spring, seem to confirm the identity of the spot as the site of old Jericho.

Leaving these mounds, we looked for the site of Herod's Jericho near the mouth of the pass between the hills through which the road to Jerusalem leads. We saw here ruins of the great aqueduct which brought water from the Fountain of Elisha to the beautiful groves and gardens of spice-trees given to Cleopatra by Mark Antony. Of the magnificent city, with its towers and

palaces and amphitheatre embosomed among palm and fruit trees, upon which our Lord gazed, nothing remained but a few fragments of masonry and broken pillars scattered here and there. But it has been well said that "this wasted corpse is better than a displacing city, than a new life rioting on the dead." It leaves more to the fancy, and is richer in suggestion. Coming from Greenock, I was especially interested in seeing here the ruins of several sugar-mills; for the sugar-cane was extensively cultivated in the plains of Jericho by the Saracens in the Middle Ages. I was fortunate enough to find several specimens of the "rose of Jericho," a plant familiar to me in a dried state, but which I had never before seen growing. In summer it sheds its leaves, its branches collapse and wither, and it rolls itself up into a ball, and the strong winds which prevail at the time carry it to the Jordan, the Dead Sea, or the Mediterranean. When it comes into contact with water it unfolds itself, expands its branches, and expels its seeds from the seed-vessels, and then is stranded, a wreck on the beach, its career ended. Meanwhile the seeds, after being saturated with water, are brought back by the waves to the shore, and from thence are taken up and sown by the winds far and wide over the land, springing up again in suitable soil into living plants. It is to this curious migratory habit for self-preservation of the rose of Jericho that the prophet Jeremiah refers, when he says to the Moabites, "Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness"—the heath in question being supposed to be this plant.

Skirting the base of the great crags of Quarantania, we were reminded that this was the traditional scene of our Lord's temptation. In imitation of our Lord, hermits, during the early Christian ages, retired for fasting and prayer to the caves which honeycombed the face of the

rocks, and left behind many interesting frescoes and inscriptions on the walls. We soon came to that wonderful gorge called the Wady Kelt, a stupendous chasm between perpendicular rocks with which few mountain ravines in Europe can compare. This is supposed to have been the retreat of the hunted prophet when the ravens fed him, and the pools of the Cherith at the bottom of the gorge, where the sun could hardly penetrate, gave him drink, when all the other waters of Israel were dried up. Along the side of this awful chasm the road to Jerusalem led. It was the same path which our Lord had traversed; but it had been very much improved of late years, and most of its difficulties and dangers obviated. From Jerusalem to the Khan of the Good Samaritan, or about half-way down, a capital carriage road was completed last spring, and we met the first carriage that had ever come from Jerusalem along this route. It was occupied by Americans; and we could not help thinking that the incident was a momentous augury of the more thorough opening up of the Jordan valley to Western enterprise, when the road should be completed all the way. There is no reason why the old prosperity of this region should not only be restored, but vastly exceeded. Upwards of 40,000 acres of the finest soil could here be cultivated, and yield the most abundant crops. All kinds of tropical produce could be raised all the year round, and transported to Western lands with greater rapidity than from any other source. And there is every likelihood that, with increased cultivation and a larger resident population, the malarial condition of the Jordan valley would be made perfectly healthy; and the peculiar softness of its air would make it a winter resort for invalids, such as is to be found in no other region so accessible. There can be no doubt that, whether under the Turks or under a more enlightened and progressive

government, the development of the magnificent capabilities of this region is only a question of a few years. And in that case, "Go to Jericho" would be the most benignant advice that a man could proffer to his friend!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CONVENT OF MAR SABA.

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness.”—*Luke* iii. 4.

THERE are two monasteries that stand out in my memory with peculiar distinctness. These are the Monastery of St. Bernard, on the highest inhabited point of the Swiss Alps, and the Monastery of Mar Saba, deep down in the heart of the wilderness of Judea. The one is set in the midst of eternal snows, and the other amid unchanging heat. Every one has heard of the St. Bernard Hospice, with its monks and its dogs, and its travellers rescued from the snowstorms; but very few comparatively know of the existence of Mar Saba, hid in its lonely desert, dreaming away its idle life far from the haunts of men. And yet the Mar Saba convent is unique among the religious institutions of the world. Its weird situation, and the strange associations which for more than a thousand years have gathered round it, create a spell of fascination which no traveller who visits the spot can resist.

Passing through the dreary homeless waste of calcined limestone hills, which stretches between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, where the scapegoat laden with the sins of Israel was annually led out to die, you come at last to

the welcome gate of the monastery, perched like an eagle's nest on the edge of the gorge of the Kedron. The convent seems to have grown out of the side of the vertical precipice. It looks a mere confused crystallisation of the rock, or a human incrustation upon it. It is difficult to tell where Nature's work ends and man's work begins. The walls and the rocks through long centuries of mutual association have grown so like each other that they are hardly distinguishable. The effect of this weird combination of the human and the natural is savage in the extreme. You look sheer down from the parapet that guards the open court of the convent, five hundred feet or more, to the bottom of the defile, where the Kedron, an intermittent thread of silver, languidly flows. The almost vertical rocks on either side are of stratified limestone in nearly horizontal courses; the strata being of unequal hardness, causing, as the result of weathering, hollows and projections to appear in the face of the cliffs. These lent themselves readily to the use of the prehistoric Horites, or Cave-dwellers, the aborigines of Palestine, who dug out cells at different heights along the face of the precipice, like martins' holes in a sand-bank. In the early Christian centuries these caves were inhabited by religious troglodytes, the followers of St. Anthony, who came thither from the Egyptian deserts. How they got access to their airy habitations, hanging between earth and heaven, seems perfectly marvellous, for it would require the strongest head and the surest foot to climb to and to walk along these dizzy ledges.

You see a considerable distance up and down the gorge, which is called the "Valley of Fire" on account of its red volcanic appearance, although it owed its formation entirely to the action of water. It is an awe-inspiring sight, with its dark unseen depths and lofty ferruginous precipices, glowing like the walls of a red-hot

furnace, each bastion and crest of rock seeming at the welding-point. There is no verdure in all the horizon, no foliage of tree, or green carpet of grass ; nothing but bare arid rocks, blistered by the hot sunshine, and worn by wind and weather into the most fantastic shapes. And yet, by Nature's wonderful law of compensation, the scarred and naked rocks take out of the sky richer colourings than could be found in the most luxuriant landscapes. It is in the desert that you have the most glorious hues of earth and sky, whose intensity is at first delightful, and then fatiguing even to pain. The naked rocks of Sinai are clothed with light as with a garment ; and the passing of the afternoon hours fills the desolate ravines of Moab with violet shadows softer than those of the forest. More verdure would be less light, and less light would be colder and fainter colour. To other regions where storms and clouds prevail, where the murmur of the stream and the ripple of the lake are heard, is given the tenderness of tree and grass and flower. But the forsaken solitudes, where no sound of brook or rustle of leaf breaks the stillness, are dowered with the choicest gifts of light, refracted by the prisms of the rocks into burning hues of indescribable splendour. Such are the glorious pictures that are unfolded in a series of quickly-fading transformation views to the inappreciative eyes of the monks of Mar Saba, in the midst of their lifeless waste, from sunrise to sunset every day.

The central point of interest in the monastery is the church, which is very ancient, but, like all Greek churches, is marred by gorgeous gilding and extravagant decoration ; a barbarous style which culminates in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. On the roof there is a belfry in which hangs a peal of bells, which for a long time were the only ones in the Turkish Empire. They were regarded as obnoxious by the

Moslems, who have no bells in their mosques, and summon the faithful to prayer by the cry of the muezzin from the minaret. But now permission is freely given to Greek and Latin Christians to use bells in their churches; and I heard their delightful musical sound in Nazareth and Bethlehem, recalling sweet memories of Sabbath days at home. In a corner of the church of Mar Saba there is a deep baptistery—which seems rather out of place in a convent. But it is doubtless a relic of the time when the early saints converted the heathen around, and raised them to the household of faith by baptism. The entrance of such adults into the church was not permitted until they had been purified by the waters of baptism, in a building outside the door of the church.

But what interests one particularly is not the costly Byzantine decorations of the church, contrasting so strikingly with the primitive ruggedness and sterility of Nature outside, but the distinct evidence which it affords that it must originally have been a cave scooped out of the rock, like the numerous artificial caves in the cliffs around formerly inhabited by hermits and recluses. It was probably St. Sabas' own cave, where he lived for many years in amicable relations with a lion as his only companion, like St. Jerome in his cave under the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, and as our Lord Himself, as St. Mark tells us, was "with the wild beasts" in this same region of His temptation. The Saint's cave became afterwards the nucleus round which the whole group of conventual buildings had gathered in course of ages, for the monastery bears unmistakable traces of having been added to in successive periods, and in different styles of architecture. St. Sabas was one of the first followers of St. Anthony and of St. Paul the Hermit. He collected together the solitaries of the Judean wilderness. Fascinated by his holy example, when he came to live in

this cave of the Kedron Valley, the anchorites who dwelt in the holes of the cliffs around joined themselves to him, that they might have the benefit of his instruction and example. In this manner was founded the peculiar institution known in the early Christian ages as a *laura*, which implied a collection of separate cells independent of each other, each inhabited by its own hermit, who conformed to no common rule or mode of living. This was the beginning of the social life of the hermits; the commencement of the monastic fraternity. In course of time this species of ecclesiastical socialism was improved by the appointment of common hours for the hermits meeting together for worship, for food, and other purposes, while each hermit was permitted to keep up the primitive fashion of living in a separate cell. This form of the institution was called a *cœnobium*. It was the mode that existed in the isle of St. Honorat in the Mediterranean opposite Cannes, which may justly be regarded as the cradle of European monasticism. This cœnobitic mode of life was in all likelihood transferred from St. Honorat to Ireland by St. Patrick, and from thence by St. Columba to Iona. At last in the sixth century St. Benedict of Mercia introduced the true monastic system, in which the hermits became monks, and lived together under one roof, though in separate cells, and observed a common rule, and were governed by a superior.

Like the conies that are still found in the Kedron Valley, the monks of Mar Saba were a feeble folk, but they made their homes in the rocks. The visitor is struck with the exceedingly strong position of the convent by Nature and by art. It is quite as much a fortress as a monastery. It has had a very stormy and eventful history, peaceful and lonely as it now looks. On account of its reputed wealth it has frequently been attacked by

the lawless tribes of the desert. In the church there are piled up against the wall hundreds of skulls in a corner behind a screen. These are the grim memorials of the invasion of the Persian hordes under Chosroes their king, who plundered the convent and slew the monks in the sixth century. As late as 1835 it was captured and pillaged by the Bedouins ; and the monks keep and pay a regular guard of Arabs at the principal gate to prevent such attacks.

Notwithstanding their seclusion in this far-away solitude, the monks of Mar Saba were by no means insensible to what was going on in the world. They took part in most of the great ecclesiastical disputations which divided the Church from time to time. Their founder, St. Sabas, was sent from his lonely retreat as an ambassador to Constantinople to induce the Emperor Anastasius the Silent to withdraw the support he had given to the powerful faction of the Monophysites, which had created a violent schism in the Church on the question of the person of Christ. The orthodox party maintained, according to the recent decision of the Council of Chalcedon, that in the person of our Lord there are two natures, the human and the divine ; whereas the Monophysite party, on the other hand, as their name implied, asserted that our Lord had only one nature, viz., the divine, and that His humanity was a mere phantasm. But St. Sabas' mission was not successful. The struggle pursued its wild and bloody career throughout all the East, and was only quelled at last by the aged Emperor appealing, in the public square of Constantinople, as a suppliant to the heated passions of the multitude, and offering, if peace could be procured by the sacrifice, to abdicate his throne. Not long after the death of St. Sabas in 531, another fierce controversy regarding the doctrines of Origen broke out. Although this great Father of the Church had long

been accused of many errors, yet hitherto his name had been regarded with veneration. But the Arians, to suit their own purposes, suddenly claimed Origen as one of their party. Those who opposed Arianism, therefore, included Origen in their hatred. Others, again, repelled the charge as unfounded, and strove to vindicate the reputation of their master. The monks of Mar Saba were divided upon this question, which brought great trouble upon both the Eastern and Western Churches. A large number of them took the side of the followers of Origen, among whom were included nearly all the monks of Palestine; but the majority in the convent maintained the heterodoxy of the great Father, and expelled their dissenting brethren. These sought accessions to their number from other monasteries, and returned and attacked the convent and got possession of it, and drove out the other party. At last, by the intervention of a military force sent by the Emperor Justinian, the followers of Origen were again expelled, and the convent restored to those who were of the Emperor's way of thinking regarding the doctrines in dispute.

One of the bitterest ecclesiastical controversies of Eastern Europe and Western Asia hinged on the point whether *icons* or sacred images were to be permitted in the worship of the Greek Church. It not only raged in the courts of emperors, but even penetrated within the walls of secluded convents, and stirred up the most dreadful strife and persecution. The monks of Mar Saba took part in it, as they had done in the previous Monophysite controversy; and two of their monks, Theophanes and his brother Theodore, were not only scourged, imprisoned, and finally banished on account of their devotion to the cause of icons, but actually branded on the face with an opprobrious epithet, and hence called ever after *grapti*. In all these ecclesiastical disputes the

community of Mar Saba invariably took what was regarded as the orthodox side, and the discussions connected therewith must have helped to sharpen their wits and keep them well abreast with the intellectual progress of the times.

Strange to say, when the din of strife was loudest in the world without, there arose in this secluded monastery a remarkable group of poetic men, who in their cells were stimulated to compose hymns of peace and devotion which have been the most precious heirlooms of the Church ever since. It reminds one of what happens when a heavy weight has suddenly fallen upon the keyboard of a piano. A great crash of confused sounds rises and stuns the ear, but as the noise subsides Nature sifts the discordant sounds, and the last echoes die away in the most pleasing harmony. And so the crash of theological controversy in this case ended in the sweetest notes of peace that have ever charmed the Christian world. There is a striking local illustration of the circumstance. The monks of Mar Saba have taken under their special guardianship a bird almost peculiar to this region. It was first found in the Kedron Valley by Canon Tristram, and was named after him Tristram's grackle. It is popularly known to visitors as the orange-winged blackbird. It is naturally a very shy bird, hiding itself in the cliffs of the gorge of the Kedron, which rings out now and then with its clear musical note. But the monks have succeeded in attracting it to the convent, where it perches on the rocks, picks up the crumbs of bread and catches the raisins they throw to it, and rewards them with its delicious music. We might compare to these rare and lovely birds, which confine their flute-like notes to this locality, the remarkable group of human singers who, during one great epoch of intellectual and spiritual revival, made their home in the convent of Mar Saba.

The most celebrated of these was John of Damascus, whose empty tomb is in the church, his remains having been carried away to Constantinople. This great theologian and hymnologist began his career as a high officer of state in his native city of Damascus. After a most active and useful life in this capacity, he disposed of all his possessions among his relatives and the poor, and retired to the solitude of Mar Saba, where he spent his remaining years, and died about 760. He lived at the time when the Eastern Church was on the eve of separation from the Western; but the great schism did not happen in his day, and therefore his unique position, at the point of divergence, gave him a commanding influence with both Churches, for he is regarded as the spiritual Father of the Latin as much as of the Greek Church. Both Churches appeal to him as an authority on theological subjects. He systematised Christian theology, applying to it the logical methods of Aristotle; and the titles of his numerous learned books would form a respectable catalogue. But it is more as a Christian poet than as a theologian that he is held in highest honour. He is considered by almost universal consent to be the greatest poet of the Eastern Church. Within the walls of Mar Saba were composed the noble strains, breathing the glorious hopes of the resurrection, which are still sung in the most impressive circumstances, such as Easter Day, throughout the whole Greek Church, and which are solemnly chanted when the dead are laid in the grave. He gave an immense impetus to Greek hymnology. Not only its doctrinal chants, but its rhythmical models and its musical accompaniments, were attributed to him. To Dr. Neale we are indebted for our knowledge of these beautiful and inspiring productions. He has translated in his book entitled *The Hymns of the Eastern Church*, in the most admirable

manner, preserving the style and spirit of the originals, no less than fourteen of the best of them, including the familiar Easter Hymn, "The Day of Resurrection."

It is by the law of contrast, one would suppose, that a poet could sing his songs in such austere circumstances. It is not usually, indeed, amid the charms of the country that the poet is inspired, but in the hard streets of the great city, with nothing but a blank wall before his window; and it is not in the glowing summer, when every sight is a picture and every sound is musical, that the Muse comes to him with visions of ideal beauty, but in the bleak and barren winter. Where Nature is reduced to her bare rocky foundations, there man with face upturned gazes into the heart of truth. In the desert, where the earth yields no harvest and proffers a stone for bread, the higher harvest of the soul is reaped, and Heaven speaks where we dwell with silence. It is according to this law of contraries that the convent of Mar Saba should be the most eminent home of Greek hymnody. When the father of John of Damascus was privy councillor or vizier of the reigning Caliph of Damascus, he redeemed many captives taken from the western shores of the Mediterranean by the Saracens, and transferred to this city. Among them was an Italian monk from Calabria called Cosmas, a man of great erudition and culture, whom he made a tutor to his son and to an adopted orphan nephew also called Cosmas. Having taught his illustrious pupils all that he knew, this Italian monk retired to the convent of Mar Saba, where he spent the rest of his life. Cosmas the Elder, as he was called, was a poet as well as a theologian, and fostered the gift of song which his pupils possessed in no ordinary degree. The similarity of name has led to much confusion in identifying the hymns due to the two poets. The greater reputation of the pupil has, however,

put the fame of the teacher into the shade ; and the larger number of hymns included under the name of Cosmas are now attributed to the pupil, who is called by way of distinction "the Melodist." He is considered to be the second of the great ecclesiastical poets. John of Damascus and he continued their early friendship all through life. In the convent of Mar Saba they animated and helped each other in the composition of their hymns. Cosmas was the most learned of the Greek poets, and his numerous hymns so abound in types and recondite allusions that commentaries were written to explain their meaning. Dr. Neale has admirably translated nine of the most popular of them, including the famous Christmas canon suggested by a sermon of the great Gregory of Nazianzus. To English readers he is best known by the hymn "The choirs of ransomed Israel," and its abbreviated form "In days of old on Sinai." In the verses prefixed to his memoir it is said :

"Where perfect sweetness dwells is Cosmas gone,
But his sweet lays to cheer the Church live on."

Another of the goodly company of the Mar Saba hymn-writers was St. Theophanes, who is said to hold the third place among the Greek sacred poets. Born about 759 in Jerusalem of pious parents, he went in early life to the Judean monastery. On account of his devotion to the icons or sacred images of the Greek Church, he was scourged and imprisoned and branded on the face with some shameful words, and then banished. When the iconoclastic cause was defeated he was triumphantly recalled. Although one of the most prolific of the Greek hymn-writers, his hymns, being mostly in celebration of the martyrs and confessors of the Greek calendar, are little known in the West. Associated with him in the early training of Mar Saba was his

elder brother Theodore, a man of iron will but tender heart, who afterwards became the superior of the great abbey of the Studium at Constantinople, and is therefore known as St. Theodore of the Studium. In the inspiring atmosphere of Mar Saba he imbibed a deep love for poetry and music, and wrote what was long considered the grandest Judgment hymn of the Church previous to the composition of the "Dies Iræ." It was the younger brother of this gifted family, it may be mentioned—St. Joseph of the Studium—who composed the beautiful and well-known hymn, "O happy band of pilgrims," which owes, however, a great deal of its excellence to its translator, Dr. Neale.

It is a most interesting circumstance that St. Stephen the Sabaite, so called to distinguish him from numerous other St. Stephens, and because he was closely identified with the monastery of Mar Saba, composed in this solitude that beautiful and familiar hymn so often sung in our churches to the appropriate tune of Stephanos, "Art thou weary, art thou languid, art thou sore distressed?" Dr. Neale in his translation has greatly modified the original Greek words—the modification adding, which is not usually the case, to the beauty and impressiveness of the hymn. He calls the hymn in his *Hymns of the Eastern Church* "Idiomela in the Week of the First Oblique Tone"; Idiomela, it may be mentioned, being a number of strophes independent as to rhythm said on solemn occasions, such as in the office for the burial of a priest, and at Vespers at Lent. One would suppose that such a hymn as "Art thou weary" would have emanated from one who was oppressed by the burdens and anxieties of active life, and not from one who had renounced them all and fled to the desert to serve God more freely without such distractions. He came here for rest of soul, expecting that here it would be found if at all on

earth. But shut out from the anxious busy world, he was shut in too much with his own unquiet heart ; delivered from the troubles of man, he was, as the poet says, "by Heaven too much oppressed." St. Stephen the Sabaite was a nephew of John of Damascus, and seems to have inherited his uncle's poetic gifts as well as his ardent piety. At the recommendation of his uncle he was taken as a novice into the convent of Mar Saba in association with his great relative, at the exceptionally early age of ten, contrary to the usual regulation. After living in the monastery for fifteen years, he left it when his uncle died ; and after spending some years in visiting other monasteries, and living in seclusion in an anchorite's cell, he returned to the convent of his first love, and died there in 794, aged sixty-nine years. The monks of Mar Saba still keep the anniversary of his death on the 13th of July ; and he is always spoken of affectionately as "Our father St. Stephen the Sabaite."

After the tenth century, when the ecclesiastical controversies and the literary efforts which had so wonderfully quickened the minds of the monks of Mar Saba were over, the convent ceased to occupy a foremost place in the eye of the Christian world. A spiritual and intellectual numbness seized it from that time onwards, and it subsided into the profound sleep of the desert. The distinguished men whose names during the first five centuries after its foundation made its reputation left no true successors. The monks of the present day are utterly unworthy of their noble ancestry. There are about sixty or seventy of them in the convent gathered from Russia, Turkey, and the Grecian Isles ; and those of them whom I saw had peculiarly stolid unemotional faces. It has been remarked that almost every living thing in the Kedron Valley partakes of the tawny hue of the rocks. The conies, the ibexes, the sand-partridges,

the foxes, the larks, the tiny porcupines are all of the same uniform russet hue, with scarcely any variation of shade. The very leaves and blossoms of the prevailing vegetation are of a brownish-yellow colour. And, like the productions of Nature, the minds of the monks by the law of assimilation have grown to the neutral tint of their surroundings. They are indolent to the last degree—a habit of mind and body fostered by the extremely narrow range of exercise within their power, and by the trivial and mechanical routine of religious observances in which they spend their time. “Parasites of another world,” they seem to have been deprived of the faculties that would have made them of use in this world; and the energy of their brains, being diverted from intellectual pursuits, was employed only in animal functions. And yet underneath their stolid stupidity there were in some faces a look which indicated slumbering passions. And this I did not wonder at, for I was told that Mar Saba has degenerated into a kind of penitentiary of the monastic fraternity. Any monk who proves incorrigible to discipline, or who is guilty of any act of violence or moral turpitude in other monasteries of the Greek Church, is sent to this more rigid seclusion to work out his reformation.

It is the irony of fate that these unworthy men should belong to the Order of St. Basil, the most popular of all the religious Orders of the East, as St. Basil himself was one of the noblest leaders of the early Greek Church. St. Basil’s ideal of the religious life was much more practical than that of the solitaries of the Thebaid or the monks of the Judean wilderness. That life, according to him, was not to be absorbed in perpetual mystic communion with the Deity, but was to be spent in labours that would be useful to the world. The retreat of the convent was to fit men for assisting their fellows in the

great centres of life. Like a streamlet that diffuses to the populous dwellers on its banks far down in the valley the blessings it has gathered from the clouds in the lonely places among the hills, so the monks retired from the world that they might communicate to men in their own busy haunts the high thoughts that had come to them from the inspiration of the desert. It need hardly be said that this idea of what monks should be was never carried out in the East, and least of all in the later annals of Mar Saba. There the solitaries who called themselves by the name of St. Basil, and followed his rule, thought that solitude was in itself meritorious, and not as a mere discipline to enable the soul to rise above the body, and to make men, freed from the appetites and desires of the lower nature, strong and brave to do the work which God had appointed for them in the world.

One of the most remarkable things in Mar Saba is a solitary palm-tree which is tied up and supported with great care in the courtyard, and erects its tall yellow stem and spreads its graceful plume of foliage over the grotesque buildings under its shadow. The hue of the palm-tree usually varies very much with the condition of the light. It assumes the changing colours of the atmosphere. But the palm-tree of Mar Saba is nearly always of a soft golden green colour, acquiring a reddish tint, like a fir stem, in the sunset glow. The Mar Saba Palm is regarded with great veneration. It is the one solitary tree in all the horizon; the only link of connection with the woods and forests of more favoured regions. Jericho, not far off, was once the city of palm-trees, but it no longer merits that title. All the palm-trees for which the Jordan Valley was renowned have disappeared, and scarcely a single specimen survives now. The palm-tree of Mar Saba is said to be very old. Tradition asserts that it sprang from seed planted by St. Sabas himself in the year 490

of our era ; but this tradition is manifestly apocryphal. Judging by the evidence of its great height, and the large number of compressed rugged rings around its trunk, it might have grown on this spot for five or six hundred years. There is one strange peculiarity about it, which is rare in the history of this kind of palm-tree. It fruits freely every season, but it produces dates which have no stones or seeds, and are soft and flaccid as berries. It cannot, therefore, reproduce itself ; and the tree must remain entirely singular, the only one of its kind.

Which thing you are inclined to think is an allegory ? How appropriate that there should be a barren palm-tree in the court of this derelict monastery ! Its age is coincident with the long decadence of the place. Its seed began to germinate after the busy eventful years of the monastery's usefulness, the years when it took the most prominent part in the intellectual and spiritual life of the Church. The Psalmist's beautiful metaphor would have suited the splendid monks of those days of renown, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." To the latest years of a long life St. John of Damascus, and St. Stephen the Sabaite, and their famous brethren of Church song and theological controversy, flourished and brought forth fruit that blessed the world. The whole Christian Church sat under their shadow with great delight, and found their fruit sweet unto its taste. The monastery was indeed in those days a Bethany, a house of dates. This one religious institution concentrated in itself and kept alive for five hundred years all the intellectual life of the Holy Land, and perpetuated into uninspired times, in their own sacred soil, the glorious ministry of kings and prophets and

godly men of old. They were in the line of spiritual succession of those whom God inspired to write the Holy Scriptures in this very region.

But a woeful change had come, and the present barren palm-tree that has grown up in the place since the great monks of Mar Saba fell asleep represents, with its seedless fruit, the idle, useless life of the present monks. They are planted in the courts of God's house. They live in the very region where David as a fugitive and outlaw learned in suffering what he taught in song, and where David's Son and David's Lord overcame all Satan's seductive temptations to an easy and selfish life by His great purpose of love to the world. They are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses; by the prophet Elijah and John the Baptist; by Essenes of the Jewish Church, who left the haunts of civilised life because of their corruptions in order to lead a simpler and holier life amid the wilds of Nature; by early Christian hermits, who for love of God lived in their swallow-like nests hanging on the grisly cliffs around; and by the noble monks from St. Sabas downwards who made their convent famous all over the world. And yet, uninfluenced by these great memories and associations, untouched by these sublime motives, the present monks of the convent are like their own seedless palm-tree, bringing forth fruit only for themselves, of no good to the rest of the world, going daily through a religious drill in which they take no interest, while a cold dead conservatism, tenacious of the smallest tenets, without knowing or caring to know the reason, has settled down upon all their religious life! A dejected woman sitting under a palm-tree, with the motto "*Judea capta*," was the symbol of God's covenant people, deprived of their heritage and privileges because they had failed to carry out God's purpose in their election and training, "that in

thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." And methinks the barren palm-tree of Mar Saba waves its selfish plumes at this day as an appropriate heraldic symbol over the degenerate monks who doze away their useless lives beneath its shadow.

THE END.

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